



FROM THE CAMPFIRE OF PATRICK SMITH, DIRECTOR OF CAMPING

The Magic of Creating Community

Paul Newman once said, "You can leave camp but camp never really leaves you." It's one of my favorite quotes because it feels so true. Whether it's your first time or hundredth coming to camp, you feel a sense of belonging here that can be hard to find anywhere else.

The first time I went to camp, I was 21. A friend encouraged me to volunteer at a camp for kids with cancer. I had no idea the experience would change my life.

I'd never been part of such a caring, close-knit community. From the kids to the volunteers, everyone was supported in ways that brought out our best selves. When I went back the next summer, the camp director said, "Welcome home." That greeting seemed just right to me: I felt I was returning to a safe place where even strangers felt like family.

Working at camps that serve children with serious medical conditions has been my life ever since.

Today, as North Star Reach Director of Camping, one of the things I love most about my job is creating community. Despite what many people think, the "camp magic" that quickly transforms strangers into

friends isn't something I create or control. I simply help to cultivate the right conditions. Bring together kids who have been cheated out of childhood experiences by illnesses with volunteers who want make a positive impact on those young lives...well, that's when something magical happens.

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Now, you might be thinking, how do I cultivate community? It's not always easy to see, but here's one way it is: I lead icebreaker activities. An assignment, earnest or silly, can create a neutral space, a common ground between people and conversations start. What three things do we share? How about two truths and a lie? Or, hey, what animal would you be?



One moment we are a group of kids and adults standing under the shade of an old oak and facing the unknown of a week at camp, and the next moment something has shifted. We're talking! We're laughing! We're sharing stories and connecting in real and surprising ways. I love this moment when it becomes clear to all of us that we have embarked on an epic summer adventure, together.




The first question I asked the doctors was, "Do you think I will be able to go to camp this year?" I hope I can.

An update on Nora...

Many supporters of North Star Reach have been thinking about 12-year-old Nora, whose story we shared in our spring fundraising appeal. Nora attended summer camp at North Star Reach for the first time when she was ten years old, discovering independence and newfound friends who shared her experiences as a cardiology patient. Last spring, Nora was facing her tenth surgery — this one to fuse her spine — and was hoping to be well enough to attend camp this summer.

We're happy to report that Nora's surgery went well and that she is healing at home with her parents and siblings. "We are so relieved!" says Connie, her mother. "She is struggling a bit with pain, but she is sleeping well and in good spirits!"

The North Star Reach family sends wishes for Nora's speedy recovery. We hope to see her well enough to join us at camp this year!

VIEW FROM THE OBSERVATORY



Medical volunteer Jacob Bilhartz, MD, examines 9-year-old Avery inside The Observatory this summer during Transplant Camp.

At first glance, it's not obvious that our campers are also patients living with serious illnesses like sickle cell anemia, congenital heart disorders, or chronic liver, kidney and heart disease. Take another look at the campers in the photograph on the front of our newsletter. While a few scars are visible, it's hard to imagine that each child has had an organ transplant and requires intensive medical care, from regular blood pressure monitoring to complex immunosuppressant medication regimens. For some, that may mean up to 50 pills a day.

These campers are able to experience summer camp only because their medical needs are supported by our team of dedicated medical professionals working behind-the-scenes at The Observatory, our state-of-the-art health center.

"For us, camp season begins in January as we do a rigorous review of medical forms for each child applying for camp," says Health Center Director Alyssa Hardy, RN, MSN. "We make sure that we have an accurate picture of each child's medications and health histories. For the 2018 summer season, we reviewed over 520 camper applications alone!"



"I felt like I was meant to come to North Star Reach."

Volunteer Doris Nerderman, BSN, RN

At each camp, medical volunteers—physicians and nurses who are sent by medical partners or who are using their vacation time to care for campers—become a vital part of the camp community. "Seeing the kids outside of the hospital environment having fun is invaluable to all the medical volunteers," says Medical Director Skip Walton, MD. "Camp is one of the few places they get to see the positive outcomes of their clinical work."

One of the largest groups of volunteers are nurses. Each cabin of eight to 12 kids has a dedicated nurse who gets to know each camper intimately, as a patient

and as a child. Nurses see campers throughout the day—delivering medications at meals, joining them for activities, and checking in during Toes-up-Time (a mid-day rest) and again at bedtime. Along with helping maintain the wellness of campers, nurses tend to specialized camper needs, like assisting with a tube feeding or changing a dressing.

"I felt like I was meant to come to North Star Reach," says volunteer Doris Nerderman, BSN, RN, who brings 28 years of experience as a camp nurse at the YMCA Camp Belknap in New Hampshire. "I've helped with reviewing the health histories, worked at multiple summer camps, volunteered for two family camps, and am looking forward to being here this summer for two sessions. They're just kids who want to have fun, like every other kid, and sometimes you forget that they have these big issues."

"My favorite thing," she adds, "is to look down from the upper balcony of the Health Center as the campers assemble for meals. From there I can watch the interactions between all the kids, the staff and the volunteers at one time. From that vantage point, I can see happiness, smiles, energy, patience, kindness and a whole lot of love. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?"

Program Director Colleen Triezenberg tells us about North Star Reach's unconventional approach to a traditional camp arts activity: painting clay flowerpots.

Wabi-Sabi Healing Pot

The wabi-sabi healing pot is one of our favorite art projects to do with campers. Wabi-sabi is a Japanese aesthetic that is about recognizing beauty in imperfection and vulnerability.

First, campers choose a terra cotta flower pot and paint the pot however they please. We ask them to represent themselves in some way as they do this—they might include a personal saying, a favorite pattern or color, or a picture of themselves.

Once the pots are dry, we go outside—and drop the pots on the cement—crash! Kids have so much fun doing this!

Next, campers gather all of their pieces. We go into our art studio and begin the careful process of gluing the pot together. The kids settle down: this part of the project requires a lot of patience and deliberation. While we're doing this, we have the opportunity to share stories and to talk about the process of healing. They can continue decorating the pot, even painting along the cracks. Each camper has had their own individual journey—and yet they're able to find ways to heal and feel whole.

The project is a lot of fun and results in a treasure to take home after camp—but it's also a powerful and memorable lesson for kids about resilience.



MEET A VOLUNTEER

Michael Parker, "Coach"

Long before "Coach" created a love song for North Star Reach, an Elvis Presley-inspired "I Can't Help Falling in Love with Camp," he'd won over the hearts of staff, volunteers and campers. A volunteer for North Star Reach's very first summer session in 2016, he's been giving generously on many fronts ever since: as a program volunteer, a donor, and as the newest member of North Star Reach's Young Professional Board. Outside of camp, he's known as Michael Parker and he works at the University of Michigan as a donor prospect management analyst.

You've given hundreds of hours to our summer and family camps. What inspires you to volunteer?

Camp is full of energy. It's full of life and joy. It's full of thoughtfulness and reflection, creativity and inspiration. Just being around that is so contagious that it makes you want to come back. The connectedness you feel—you can't really find that anywhere else but here.

What would you say to someone who is interested in volunteering but nervous because they've never been to camp or worked with kids with serious illnesses?

The thing is not to worry about what you can't bring but what you can bring. And that's just yourself: being there and being present, being thoughtful in what it is



that we do. Camp is designed to prepare you. There's going to be some ups and downs, but they make sure you are supported and that you have the resources to be successful in having an impact on a kid's life. For some of them, this is the only time they get to really be active and outgoing. To be part of that is a great opportunity.

What you consider one of your greatest challenges at camp?

Becoming a Unit Director for the first time last year. I was going from being in a cabin, being one-on-one with kids, to overseeing an entire unit. I was nervous about the new opportunity, and the new responsibility—but just like every other experience with camp, there's so many supportive people and

resources to help guide you. I've grown a lot as a person from that experience. This year, I'll be a Unit Director for the Epilepsy camp.

What skill do you think camp has helped you master?

Creativity. There's songs, and skits and thinking on the fly to make sure every kid feels involved and included. I'm able to channel my inner kid around these kids. I didn't really think of myself as a creative person, but through camp, it just naturally trickled down to me and now it trickles into my day-to-day life.

What have you learned about yourself?

Something that I've learned through the kids is that they are determined, persevering individuals. When I'm going through a hard day, I think about my camp experience with those kids. They would take 7-8 medication pills at lunch and be like "Alright, we're going swimming, right?" I learned more perseverance and more determination.

How has camp impacted your professional work?

It's given me confidence. When you're at camp leading a song or giving instructions, all eyes are on you. Then when I'm in a meeting at work, I'm able to draw on that experience—being energetic and having a presence.

Listen to Coach's love song: bit.ly/camplovesong

We Are Family! Courtney's Story

Courtney Atwell, mother of Kelsey, shares her experiences at Palliative Care Family Camp in May and tells us about a very special thank you gift she created for the camp staff.

What moment of family camp stands out for you?

You know, from the minute we parked the car, I felt the energy, the help—just relief! You put your shoulders down like, "Wow, these people care about us."

I can't even sum it up one word because family camp was just breathtaking, every moment of it. We meet up with the other families still—we talk to them all the time, go to their houses, go do things—they're like family.

I was telling the staff that I don't think "volunteer" is a good word for the people at camp. I said "You guys are family."

Tell us about the beautiful sign!

I left a little cute note in our cabin last time, on their erase boards, but that gets erased.

I was like "How can I thank them?" I sat down and thought about the things that camp brought to families. We get so much from you. I summed it up on the board as best as I could. I'll never be able to thank North Star Reach enough, but the sign was something that will be fitting for every single person that comes in that door. It will be a reminder to you and it'll sum it up for all the parents that walk through the doors.



Courtney and daughter Kelsey with the rest of the family at Palliative Care Family Camp in May.

**NORTH STAR REACH
THANK YOU FOR ALL THAT YOU ARE AND ALL THAT YOU DO!
THANKS FOR SHOWING US A GOOD TIME AT CAMP WHEN WE NEEDED IT MOST.
YOU TEACH LOVE, SUPPORT AND STRENGTH.
THANKS FOR SHOWING WE MATTER AND WE ARE NOT ALONE.
THANKS FOR SHOWING ABILITIES OUTWEIGH DISABILITIES.
WE LOVE YOU NORTH STAR REACH!
THIS IS NOT GOODBYE, THIS IS SEE YOU LATER!
WE ARE FAMILY!**

SERIOUSFUN NEWS

SeriousFun Children's Network and INDYCAR are teaming up to make more camp magic happen. "There were two places where my dad loved to spend his time and could truly be himself, at the track and at camp," said Clea Newman, daughter of legendary actor—and race car driver and team owner—Paul Newman, who founded SeriousFun. A small group of North Star Reach campers joined Newman at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in May to help make the announcement.

North Star Reach campers and families also traveled to the Chevrolet Detroit Grand Prix in June to meet racing celebrities and catch the action. The new charitable partnership will benefit all Network camps. (Check out our Facebook album for the fantastic trackside photos!)

Upcoming Events

Under the Harvest Moon
North Star Reach Camp, Pinckney
Friday, September 14, 2018

Fall Family Festival
North Star Reach Camp, Pinckney
Sunday, October 21, 2018

Under the North Star
Historic Eastern Market, Detroit
Friday, September 20, 2019



Working together to make every moment of camp cost-free: Even though camp comes at no charge, getting to North Star Reach can be a barrier for some families.

That's especially true for kids who live as far away as Chicago, Grand Rapids, and even Detroit.

We're thrilled we can offer free bus transportation to campers this year, thanks to significant in-kind donations from Dean Transportation. Last summer, our camper transportation costs were offset by contributions from Dean Transportation, Blue Lakes Charter & Tours, Chicago's Advocate Children's Hospital, and the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Illinois. Because of their generosity, we can offer a cost-free camp experience, door to door.

Looking for social responsibility and employee engagement opportunities for your company? We'd love to hear from you. To find out more, contact April Gasbarre: 734-680-8744 or april@northstarreach.org.



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Program volunteer Michael Scarborough with Louis, 7, who traveled to Cardiology Camp from his home in Detroit.



Share the gift of camp with more kids.
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