

NEW AMPHITHEATER ROOF, NEW SPACE FOR CAMPERS TO SHINE

This summer our amphitheater gained a roof, walls, costume closet, sound system, and lights. Our deepest thanks to founding donor, Mott Golf Classic, for generously supporting the construction of our amphitheater area. We're also indebted to our friends at SeriousFun Children's Network for a grant to support this summer's improvements. The beautiful space is home to our opening and closing campfires, where campers gather for out-of-this-world performances, songs, stories and skits. The evenings allow kids to have their own moment to spread their wings and shine.

(Photo of the closing campfire during Epilepsy Camp, by Eric Bronson/Michigan Photography.)



Madison hands the microphone back after finishing her own acapella version of "Rewrite the Stars" from one of her favorite films, "The Greatest Showman."



SERIOUSFUN NEWS

We're thrilled to announce the launch of a new line of family-friendly games from Hasbro and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* that help raise awareness of SeriousFun Children's Network and our life-changing mission. The board games are based off three games that Jimmy Fallon plays on his show (Box of Lies, Face It Challenge and Best Friends Challenge). Each game box features SeriousFun on the side panel and includes a slip sheet that introduces SeriousFun to the players, educating them about the mission and the incredible impact of SeriousFun camps. North Star Reach is honored to have a photo of our campers on the slip sheet! We're tremendously grateful to Hasbro and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* for their incredible support. Games are sold online and can also be found at most major retailers. We can't wait to play them at camp this summer.



Upcoming Events

Probility Ann Arbor Marathon
Ann Arbor, MI
Sunday, March 22, 2020

New Camper Orientation
North Star Reach, Pinckney, MI
Sunday, May 3, 2020

Dexter-Ann Arbor Run
Ann Arbor, MI
Sunday, May 31, 2020

Stay Connected With Us!

OFFICE
674 S. Wagner
Ann Arbor, MI 48103
Phone: 734-680-8744

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TRAIL MIX

A limited print edition dedicated to our generous donors who make camp possible.

Winter 2020



Zaria poses with her cabin friends and Lauryn, a Seasonal Staff Member, on the playing fields at camp in August 2018.

THE HEALING POWER OF CAMP: ONE CHICAGO FAMILY'S STORY

Chicago camper Zaria Sparks was born with sickle cell anemia, an inherited disease that leads to red blood cells that are misshapen. Her sickle-shaped cells have trouble carrying oxygen throughout her body. They also put the 10-year-old at risk for severe pain, anemia, stroke, even organ failure.

Zaria's pain was especially harrowing last winter. She went to the hospital for her longest stay yet—two months—and received treatments that included powerful IV painkillers.

"She's missed out on so many things," says her mother, Sierra. "She has to catch up on her schoolwork and explain to people why she was out. Friends she was close with—they make new friends. She often feels like she's starting over."

But Zaria's future is getting brighter, thanks to supporters like you who make it possible for her to attend camp. For the past three summers, she's traveled from Chicago to Michigan to go to North Star Reach's Sickle Cell Camp. She's enjoyed the healing power of outdoor adventures, laughter, and, best of all, friendships with other kids who understand what it's like to live with a debilitating disease.

Camp has also taught her coping skills to help when she's suffering from a severe

pain crisis. "When I was at camp my first year," she says, "I had bad sickle cell pain and they told me to do breathing exercises and to do yoga. When I was at the hospital, I tried it, and it helped."

Zaria returned from camp last August wanting nothing more than to get back to Michigan in September, to connect with her friends at an upcoming Fall Family Camp.



"We spend so much time in the hospital, there isn't a lot of time for vacations. Even then, we can't afford them because we're inundated with hospital bills. I'm so thankful to the people who don't even know us making donations to make sure families like ours can enjoy simple things like camp. They mean everything to us." - Sierra, Zaria's Mom

Her mom was scared to make the long trip. That's because Zaria's eight-year-old sister, Zoe, also has intensive medical needs. She has cerebral palsy and epilepsy and is unable to walk. Family road trips mean Sierra must bring Zoe's wheelchair, supplemental oxygen, feeding machine, special foods, and dozens of medicines for both her daughters.

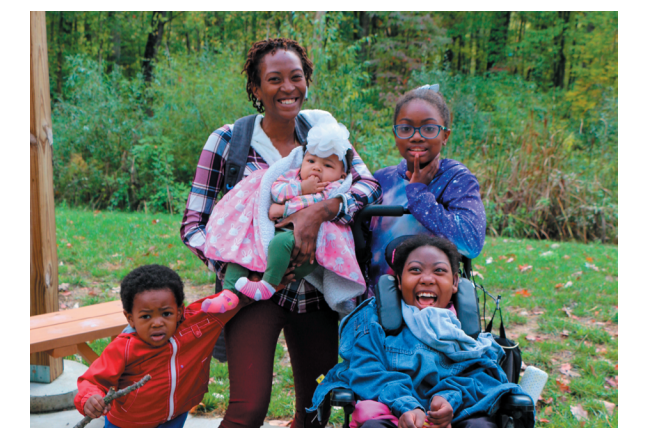
But inspired by Zaria's passion for camp, Sierra did the unthinkable: She loaded up the family van with medical supplies and equipment and set off from their home on the southside of Chicago with Zaria, Zoe,

their two-year-old brother, Zak, and baby sister, Zayna.

They arrived at camp safely, where they were greeted by camp staff and volunteers, who immediately helped to unload their gear and care for the kids. A hot dinner and warm cabin awaited.

That night Sierra and her children slept more soundly than they had in months. It was just the beginning of a restorative, healing weekend. **Sierra says she will never forget the kindness, compassion and generosity from staff, volunteers and donors who gave her family the healing gift of camp.**

"I left with a whole different outlook," she says. "I don't think I've ever had such a positive experience in my entire life. We were able to put our stress aside completely and just have a good time and enjoy each other." And Zaria, she adds, "had the biggest smile the whole time. She's maintained that spirit ever since we left camp. It was an amazing trip for us all."



Sierra, pictured at last fall's family camp, holding her 10-month-old daughter Zayna; to her right is Zak, 2; to her left is Zaria, 10, and Zoe, 8.

VIEW FROM THE OBSERVATORY



“North Star Reach is a haven for kids with sickle cell,” says nurse Molly Rouke, pictured last summer with the kids she cares for at camp and in clinic.

Molly Rouke (BSN, RN, CPN) is the dedicated sickle cell nurse at Chicago’s Advocate Children’s Hospital. In her four years as a North Star Reach volunteer nurse, she has recruited dozens of her own patients to attend camp—around 20 each summer, including Zaria (featured on the previous page). She also coordinates the bus transportation for campers, paid for by a generous donation from Advocate Children’s Hospital. And she recruits other medical experts to volunteer. Her dedication to camp has helped to establish North Star Reach as a top-notch sickle cell camp program in the Great Lakes Region.

Why do you recommend camp to your patients?

Camp is a great place for them to attend a summer camp just like a healthy child but also to know that they are safe, they’ll get their medications and we know how to take care of them if a problem arises.

North Star Reach also gives our urban kids a great opportunity to experience nature and all that it has to offer, like fishing, canoeing, and archery. It gives them a great opportunity to learn new things and realize the world’s a bigger place than Chicago.

What do you learn about your patients at camp?

Whether it’s chasing fairies, celebrating ‘burst of firsts’ for trying something new, or seeing them up on stage during the talent show, I have an intimate look at them ‘just being kids.’ They can take risks, be themselves, and laugh a whole lot. It is a privilege to care for them, and to experience camp alongside them.

How do you help Chicago-area parents considering camp for the first time to overcome their fears of sending their child away to camp in Michigan?

I’m the dedicated sickle cell nurse in our clinic, and I do rounds in the hospital. I have a trusting relationship with them. I let them know I’m going to be at camp, and I will keep an eye out for their child. That gives them a great sense of comfort.

We also host an education night for camp families. Some parents have limited Internet access, so we help them fill out the online application. And we answer their questions. Last year, we had a teenage girl who’d never been to camp. One of our return campers was there, and she was able to explain why she

keeps going back. The girl decided to go to camp! There’s nothing better than kids telling kids why they go.

The bus ride between Chicago and camp is four and a half hours. Can you talk about the planning that goes into supporting the long journey?

On the ride to camp, we make sure the kids bring comfort items to have on the bus—a teddy bear or pillow or blanket. We have plenty of water and we have breakfast for them. We also bring activities from our Child Life department—coloring books, cards and other games.

The bus ride home requires more medical attention, just from the wear and tear of all the activities during the week at camp. Usually there are kids who need pain meds or heat packs. And there are tears. You’ll see kids who have been to camp before comforting the ones who are tearful about heading home. It’s so cool to see these kids forming close friendships. I’ll hear in clinic how they are staying in touch between camp sessions. These are experiences that can never be taken from them.

THE IMPACT OF CAMP

YOU’RE HELPING TO CHANGE LIVES, ONE CAMPER AT A TIME

Here are just a few voices from our campers and camper families from the Chicago area about the incredible impact of the 2019 camp season.

“This wasn’t just a weekend for my son to have a good time or to meet some other kids with sickle cell/chronic pain. It was a time for our whole family to have fun together alongside other families who truly understand what it takes to battle chronic illness.”

-Amy, Camper Parent, from Naperville, Illinois

“It’s been really nice to get out of the city and be in nature for a week. We get to see things you don’t normally see like stars, because the skyline blurs it out.”

-Eric, 17, Solstice Camper, from Chicago

“When we picked her up (after her first summer), she was so happy. She’s like, ‘I can’t wait to go next year. Let’s make sure we do the application today.’ That has been the experience every year, even as she’s gotten older.”

– Sierra, Camper Parent, from Chicago

“North Star Reach has been a shining star to some dark nights. For the parents and the child, it is time to just have fun.”

-Monica, Camper Parent, from Chicago



CAMP CHAMPION FOR PEDIATRIC PATIENTS WITH SICKLE CELL DISEASE

North Star Reach medical volunteer Dr. Lewis Hsu, pictured at right, is Director of Pediatric Sickle Cell at Children’s Hospital University of Illinois. He is also the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America’s Vice Chief Medical Officer. He recently published an article in the *Ochsner Journal* about the unique care coordination required at summer camps to safely accommodate children with sickle cell disease.



Three important accommodations detailed in his article, which are followed at North Star Reach’s summer sessions, include:

- Frequent water breaks to prevent dehydration, which is a major cause of sickle cell pain episodes
- Heated pool to keep campers from getting chilled during swimming, because sudden temperature changes can trigger a pain crisis
- Provide extra linens and absorbent bed pads since sickle cell disease can cause bedwetting

Our thanks to former North Star Reach Medical Director Dr. Skip Walton, who also contributed to the *Ochsner Journal* article.



AN INSPIRED CAMPER GIFT

Many North Star Reach supporters learned of the chain reaction started by one of our youngest campers during our 2019 year-end fundraiser. Last summer, during Sibling Camp, Lyla emptied her piggy bank and donated \$4.67 to camp – money she saved from doing her chores and the tooth fairy. She gave generously so that other kids like her could experience camp and to ensure “camp wouldn’t go away.”

We’re thrilled to announce our year-end fundraiser brought in \$32,620, with a portion of that inspired by Lyla’s incredible gift. Thank you for your phenomenal support to make camp possible for even more kids with serious illnesses.