

The CAMP OAKHURST CHALLENGE



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Winter 2010



President Bill Clinton and Jonathan Moore

Jonathan Moore - -

"Most people sit around hoping the world will change, / sit as / go around and change the world."

Looking at this photograph probably has you wondering who Jonathan Moore was. Let's start off by saying that he was an extraordinary young man,

who in his brief thirty years never let his disability define him, but rather he defined it. He was an individual who didn't know the meaning of the word "can't." If there was something he wanted to do, he found a way. Perseverance was more than just a word with him.

Jonathan was also a Camp Oakhurst alumnus.

He was first diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy in

the third grade at which time he had to transfer to an elementary school that had access to an elevator. With the support of a very tight knit family, he pursued his education and extracurricular activities, becoming a Cub and later Boy Scout, where his father served as a scoutmaster.

Jonathan attended Camp Oakhurst as an adolescent, where he met some of his life long friends and more importantly, as his mother put it, "he started to get used to being part of the disabled world and be comfortable with it." At Camp, she said, "he could let his hair down and be himself. A lot of the ideas for his future were developed at Camp." It was there that he came to realize that "he could be an extremely viable part of the community even with the disability," she added.

Outside of Camp he remained in contact with his friends, and during the school year they became involved in a theater group, The Fearless Theater Company. The group developed a play which went on to be performed at Lincoln Center. It gave viewers insight into the daily lives of young adults with disabilities.

In 1994, Jonathan was granted a thirty minute one on one meeting with President Bill Clinton, through the Make A Wish Foundation. He wanted to discuss advocacy issues with the President, and during their meeting they touched on subjects such as health care for persons with disabilities and accessible transportation.

From childhood, Jonathan was interested in understanding how everything worked, from cooking to computers. And the remarkable thing was that he did just that, often using the hands of his attendant Estrean to assist him. She recalled fondly how while working with him she would prepare gourmet meals with his instruction.

Jonathan became involved with computers in 1988 and attended college at New York University majoring in computer science. His father, who works for IBM, remarked how he would come to Jonathan for technical support, rather than his co-workers.

At NYU, Jonathan was elected a student senator-a t large. He was able to secure a job working for the

YWCA of NYC in 2000 developing a grant proposal and curriculums for a new program called The Networking Project for Young People with Disabilities. Weekend classes were held in which young people were taught basic computer skills and how to use adaptive devices and basic software to accommodate their specific disabilities. The goal was to provide students with the necessary tools to be able to seek employment in the work force, live independently, develop healthy relationships and travel.

One of Jonathan's personal goals was to reach out to the children who felt that they were limited by their disability. Even when he had his own health issues to deal with, he would come to class to encourage his students. There were times when his classroom was overflowing with more than fifty students, who all found moral support by his success. It was a great disappointment to Jonathan when the program lost its funding in its eighth year.

Jonathan died in December 2008. He touched the lives of many people – his fellow campers, his co-workers, his students, his family and friends. His life is an inspiration to all who knew him.

(The NYSH wants to thank his parents, Ron and Ronni Moore and his attendant, Estrean Gayle, for their help in writing this article.)

Camp Launches Respite Weekend Program for Autistic Children

In the fall of 2009 Camp Oakhurst held two pilot weekend Respite programs for autistic children and young adults. The program was initiated by Charles Sutherland, Camp Director, who felt that there was a definite need in New Jersey for respite service for this population.

For Camp this was a break from its traditional clientele. The staff were given extensive training, including attending instructional workshops held by the Association for Retarded Citizens. The cabins were retrofitted to meet the special needs of this population.

A program was then designed, focusing on the

cognitive abilities of the children. Emphasis was placed on repetition and activities scaled to shorter time periods. The staff client ratio was one to two. For the two sessions, which were held in October and November there were six clients in attendance at each.

The October session began with arrival early Friday evening and departure late Sunday afternoon. The children arrived with personal items, allowing them to feel more comfortable with their surroundings. After settling in, they were given a tour of the facility to familiarize them with their surrounding, thus relieving any unnecessary anxiety. After dinner was served, in which social interaction was encouraged, everyone participated in arts and crafts, making decorations for their space in the cabin to help personalize the area, name tags were created for each bed and pictures drawn to be hung on the walls. The children were encouraged to take part in various activities including playing board games and letter writing, after which they were then instructed on the routine and schedule of activities for the next day. Prior to bedtime, staff stressed the importance of personal hygiene.

Saturday began with a gentle wake up, followed by breakfast. Activities included adapted recreation such as basketball and softball, followed by media arts, where each individual was given instruction on creating a music dvd in which they were the stars. There was a walk along the Camp's nature trail and then lunch and cabin time, in which clients had the choice to take a nap or engage in group activities. In the afternoon everyone took part in a cooking lesson, which turned out to be a favorite, especially the eating part. Saturday evening saw a night of karaoke and dancing prior to bedtime.

For the families whose members attended the sessions it was an opportunity to get a much needed break, either to relax, or engage in activities such as going out to dinner or a movie without worrying.

Comments we received from parents were all favorable, and most expressed thanks for a much needed break. One said, "I was at my wit's end. There are no other overnight services available." The father of a 10 year old boy said, "I had the best two nights sleep, knowing my child was being taken care of and my assistance wasn't needed."

As for those in attendance, they had the opportunity to have fun away from home in a non threatening social environment. The parent of a nonverbal ten year old boy stated, "I can tell by the look on his face that he had a good time." Another asked, "when is the next time?"

With two sessions under its belt, Camp plans to accept larger groups in the future. Currently, there are thirty families waiting to be interviewed. There are six weekend sessions scheduled between February and June.

For more information on the program you can call Charles Sutherland, Camp Director at the NJ Camp office at 732-531-0215.

From the Desk of the Executive Director

2009 will be remembered by many for the impact that the Great Recession had on their lives. It was just as devastating to many non-profits. Some closed, some laid off workers, some reduced service. Camp Oakhurst was not immune to the downturn. However, it did not lay off any workers; it remained open throughout the year and it did not turn away anyone who came for help.



We did delay the start of some improvement projects, like the renovations of the Marions and Oaks cabins, which were scheduled for the spring of 2009. And we did ask all of our year-round staff to accept two week furloughs, which they did, to ensure

that no one would be laid off. It is another clear indicator of just how genuine our staff's commitment is to the Agency's mission. Everyone pitched in and worked just a little bit harder to make up for those who were out on furlough.

In the fall of 2008 the Agency launched a two million dollar, multi-year capital Campaign for the Second Century. Of the funds raised: 50% will go to Camp Scholarships, 25% for physical improvements and 25% for program development. Early success, led by keystone pledges from members of the Board, enabled us to resume renovations to camper cabins. By the end of 2009, the Marions and Oaks were done. Work on the Maples and Lehman's are underway, and will be completed in time for summer camp this June.

The renovations not only improved the appearance of the cabins, but with the installation of automatic doors on the porches, made them more accessible for people in wheelchairs. It is another example of the Camp's attempt to adjust to the increased number of wheelchair users it now serves.

In November the Agency initiated weekend respite service to families caring for an autistic child. Many agencies and groups had urged the Camp to explore providing this population with out-of-home, overnight respite and its initial success has encouraged us to expand service. In 2010 we are offering these families five weekends from February to June. Proposals have been submitted to further increase service into 2011.

Looking back at 2009, Camp Oakhurst bent but certainly did not break under the weight of the Great Recession. Rather, it showed its mettle. I am confident that 2010 will be another banner year for the Agency as it faces down the economic threats and continues to meet the changing needs of disabled people and their families.

Pre-Vocational Training at Camp Oakhurst

Camp Oakhurst will be able to enrich the summer camp experience for as many as 24 adolescents by

integrating pre-vocational training into familiar recreational and educational programs. Thanks to a generous grant from the Kessler Foundation, participants will be able to better prepare themselves for eventual entry into the job market.

We know that to make vocational training more effective, young people need to develop their self confidence, self esteem, and acquire basic social skills that are essential in a job setting. We and the Kessler Foundation feel that Camp Oakhurst can play an important role in preparing our adolescent campers for the critical tasks of job training that lie ahead.

Teenagers in the program will be offered camp scholarships that will enable them to stay at Camp for at least four weeks and as long as six. They will enjoy the same camp activities that they have enjoyed in the past, with one activity focused on developing their pre-vocational skills.

The pre-vocational activities may include learning how to ask for and receive better personal care; practice in meeting the kind of people who conduct job interviews; improving literacy skills such as reading, writing and communication; hearing from vocational training professionals about opportunities after high school; observing how offices and other work places have been successfully adapted to promote the employment of disabled people; and meeting with disabled adults who have achieved success in the workplace.

Parents and former campers can call the office about the admission process for the program. Others may receive calls from our caseworkers encouraging them to sign up. Campers between the ages of 13 and 18 will be eligible.

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