

# INTRODUCTION



Ontario Camps Association

*Camps Parents Trust*

# Introduction

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although there were very few children's camps in the 1930s, a small group of camp visionaries took it upon themselves to meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern, such as the importance of offering a well-balanced programme, providing a good diet, properly maintaining facilities and equipment, developing an appreciation for our environment and building character. At the time, the forefathers of Ontario's camp movement operated privately owned camps, but because their backgrounds included time spent at the YMCA, YWCA and Canadian Girls-In-Training (CGIT), they were quick to also include agencies and churches that operated camps. As this group of camp professionals grew so did their vision, and, as such, in 1932 the Ontario Camping Association (OCA) was formed.

With the post-war baby boom, the number of camps in Ontario multiplied rapidly and the OCA grew accordingly. For thousands of children, camp became an integral part of growing up. Besides traditional programming, camps began to specialize in different areas such as extended canoe trips, specific activity focuses, and programmes that catered to different special needs.

Over the past 80+ years, the diversity amongst OCA Members has expanded, and each of its more than 400 camps is extremely unique in its own right. In fact, the huge diversity that exists amongst OCA member camps is one of the Association's strengths. Our camps are large and small, co-ed or single gender, located in remote settings or downtown buildings, use rustic or modern facilities, offer specialized or general programmes, and serve a broad spectrum of special needs.

With more than 600 Members (approximately 400 Accredited Camps and 200 Individual Members, Affiliates and Preferred Vendors), the OCA is much larger than our founders ever imagined. However, we have not lost sight of our primary goal: to enable children to learn new skills, make new friends and have fun in a safe, healthy and caring environment.

We are moving towards our centenary with both the anticipation and purpose of continuing to provide children and parents with a variety of quality summer camps.



Camp Mini-Yo-We

For more information on the history of the Ontario Camps Association, visit our archives at Trent University Archives.

# The Ontario Camps Association: Our Purpose, Values and Promise

## OUR PURPOSE

The Association's purpose is to promote the benefits of camping as a professional, safe and quality experience through Standards, advocacy and education.

## OUR VALUES:

Safety, Leadership,  
Accountability, Professionalism,  
Responsiveness and  
Community.

## OUR PROMISE:

The OCA is accountable for promoting and upholding the highest camping Standards.

The essence of the Ontario Camps Association (OCA) is to bring camps together to continuously improve camping in Ontario. The Association provides health and safety standards, educational conferences and workshops, resources and information to increase the capacity of understanding the value of the camp experience at large and for the industry, campers, staff, and the public at large.

## OUR PILLARS

### A) Commitment to Safe Camping

- Standards Visit Process
- Standards Visits
- Training and Education
- Crisis Response Manual
- Committees: Standards, Standards Review, Health Care, etc.
- Utilizing the expertise of Professionals
- Partnerships and Networks

### B) Professional and Caring Community

- Mentoring Members
- Code of Ethics
- Conferences and Workshops
- Networking/Information Sharing
- Board Members: Professionals
- Professional Partnerships with Lawyers, Insurance, Education, etc.
- OCA Professional Staff
- Professional Preferred Vendors

### C) Advocacy and Education

- Committees: Health Care, Bylaws, Government Relations, Finance, etc.
- Website, Newsletters
- Volunteer Recognition
- Email Alerts
- Mentoring New and Established Camps

The services provided by OCA include educational programmes, conferences, accreditation support, mentoring, networking, monitoring and lobbying legislation at the federal and provincial levels and more.

OCA's Accredited Camps offer programmes and operations which are a very diverse. Camps are both day and overnight camps; they are owned privately, operated by agencies or special needs organizations, or by commercial entities. Many of the traditional camps are still located by lakes and rivers; however, the growing camp community provides camp experiences in many unique settings such as hospitals, hotels, universities, colleges, commercial buildings, and municipal and conservation authority parks, etc. Camps may operate for a month, from one week to three weeks or they could be offered as a one or two day programme. Campers' ages currently range from four to 81 years old. Prior to 2016, many OCA Accredited Day Camps offered a camp experience to children from 18 months to four years of age.

Programmes provided are as diverse as the campers who attend camp; from engineering, to photography, to pet care, to learning new or ancestral languages, to canoeing and kayaking, to sports, academia, therapy, religion and more, OCA's camps offer unique and inspiring enrichment programmes. OCA's Accredited Camp Members deliver valuable programmes; children and adults have the opportunity to learn powerful lessons in community, character building, skill development, and healthy living.



Wapameo: Taylor Statten Camps

# Accreditation Process

## PURPOSE

The central purpose and focus of the Ontario Camps Association's (OCA) Accreditation Programme is to help camps create an enriching, positive, safe and healthy experience for the children and staff in their care. Using the Year-round Standards, camp owners/directors can examine their entire operation and determine if and where improvements should be made.

As stated earlier, the OCA was founded in 1933; however, the introduction of the Standards Programme and process for Accreditation occurred in 1965. At that time, the document, A Study of Camps Practises, listed the best camps practises as determined by the membership of the OCA. Simultaneously, the Standards Visitation Programme began and camps had to meet the applicable standards for their camp in order to become an Accredited Member of OCA. The Standards document is a living document that was revised in 1979, 1981, 1991, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2015. For over 15 years OCA Members have asked for Year-round Standards to use as a tool not only their summer camps during July and August) but for year round programmes from September to June. In 2014, the Standards Review Committee took on the task of creating Year-round Standards and in 2016 the draft Year-round Standards were presented to the OCA Board of Directors and to the Membership for their review, comments and approval. These new Year-round Standards are based on the approved 2015 Guidelines for Accreditation and they will continue to be revised as required.

Membership in the OCA and a commitment to follow the Standards listed in the Guidelines for Accreditation are not required to operate a camp. However, camp owners/directors who do belong to OCA and voluntarily comply with the Year-round Standards recognize the importance of health and safety and the value of high standards. Every time a camp owner/director signs an annual membership renewal form or a page of a Standards Visitation Form, the camp is re-committing to upholding the OCA Standards.

As stated in the Our Purpose, Values and Promise section, every OCA camp is unique; however, there are commonalities where concern for health and safety must be addressed: the campers, the staff, the programme, the site and facility, and business practises. Therefore, one set of standards is used for all camps. Despite the many differences that make each camp special, a camp must carefully study the Year-round Standard and strive to meet the intent and objective of Standard that apply to its operation.



Camp Wenonah



Where an accredited camp is located outside of Ontario, it is recognized that it may not operate in accordance with Ontario laws mentioned in the Standards, but rather in accordance with the laws of its jurisdiction(s).

OCA is not a licensing body. Some Standards duplicate government regulations, but frequently, an OCA Standard is higher. The document includes areas not covered by government regulations. The Year-round Standards Programme and Accreditation are not imposed by any government or external body. Professional camp leaders and all OCA members determine these “best camps practises.” Camps may operate without membership in the OCA.

## **APPLICABILITY OF YEAR-ROUND STANDARDS**

The Year-round Standards are intended to quantify all operations and programmes of summer camp to ensure that the OCA Year-rounds Standards are being met. At this time the Year-round Standards are meant to be utilized as a tool to assist camp directors as to where they apply from September to June. These Standards also define areas of responsibilities for Day and Overnight Camps, Short Term Programmes (September to June) and Rentals.

There are occasions when federal and provincial laws coincide with OCA Year-round Standards, and others that are not linked to government regulations but are considered Best Practises. Camps should always abide by the more stringent regulation, laws or standards governing their specific camps.

## **DIFFERENT REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS**

The Year-round Standards may vary based on who is delivering the programme or services and who has the responsibility for supervision for campers. For example, the requirements for collecting and maintaining health information and healthcare supervision are different when the camp is operating an overnight camp versus a weekend group that rents the camp facilities to run their own programme.

When rental groups are responsible for their own care and supervision, camps may only need to advise rental groups of their limitations at camp and/or youth specific concerns. Camps may not be responsible for collecting health forms, leader qualifications, vehicle maintenance records and so on, in these circumstances.

Accreditation is the responsibility of the Board of Directors of the OCA.

**NOTE: Camps that provide before and after camp care are required to follow all appropriate standards during this programme time.**

## ELIGIBILITY

The Ontario Camps Association Constitution and By-Law #1 (2014) Section 7, pages 8 – 9, contains the requirements of membership in the OCA.

Camps are eligible to begin the accreditation process when they:

- have operated for a minimum 100 camper days (number of campers x number of days);
- have operated for a minimum of one fiscal year;
- deliver camp programmes and services that are in keeping with the OCA's values; and,
- agree to the Year-round Standards Visits Process every four years once they are accredited.

## PROCESS FOR ACCREDITATION FOR A NON-MEMBER CAMP

Camps applying for accreditation who meet the eligibility requirements and have paid the appropriate dues will submit their application by November 1 or February 1.

The Membership Committee will meet to review the applications. Applicants will be called if their applications are not complete or if further information is required.

The Membership Committee will make a recommendation to the Board of Directors listing the camps they deem ready for the accreditation process.

The Board will approve the list of applicants to become Provisional One (P1) Applicants. They will be assigned mentors and scheduled for the Year-round Standards Training in April.

Year-round Standards Visitors will be assigned in April and the camp and Visitor will be notified following the assignment. It is the camp director/owner's responsibility to contact the Visitor and schedule a Visit in July (or when the camp is operating) and to also schedule a rainy day date. Before the Visit, it is the camp director or owner's responsibility to complete the electronic Answer Sheets by June 15.

From September to November, the Standards Committee meets to review the Visits and make recommendation to the OCA Board on whether a camp may move from a P1 Applicant to a Provisional Two (P2) Applicant. Following the Board Meetings, applicants are notified of the Board's decision.

Camps that become P2 Applicants will have a Year-round Standards Visit the following summer. If they meet all of the Year-Round Standards that apply to their camp, the camp will become an Accredited Camp.

# Preparation for the Visit

## PRIOR TO THE VISIT

The camp is responsible for contacting their assigned Visitor to arrange a mutually convenient date for the visit. The initial contact should be made as soon as the camp receives their Visitor's name and contact information. The date for the visit should be set as early in the summer as possible. At this time, an alternate date could also be set in case the first date has to be changed.

Once the date(s) are scheduled, it is the camp's responsibility to notify the OCA office of the agreed date(s).

The Visitor and/or camp must contact the OCA office if difficulty is experienced in arranging the visit or if, for any reason, the Visit cannot be completed.

The Visitor should review all the Year-round Standards and Compliance information prior to the visit to ensure that he or she is familiar with all aspects of the Year-round Standards.



*Camp Arrowhon*

The camp director should review all the Year-round Standards and completes the electronic answer sheets by June 15. The camp director/board member/owner should prepare all materials outlined in the Year-round Standards for review and discussion with their Visitor.

If the camp director is unsure of the meaning of a question, they should call the OCA office at 416-485-0425 or 1-844-485-0425 prior to the visit.

In the spring camps will be emailed online answer sheets. For those camps without Internet, a hard copy of the answer sheets will be mailed. The online answer sheets must be completed by June 15. The Visitor will also be given this information for the visit.

The director should include their staff in all aspects of the visit, by providing them with a hard copy or electronic version of the Year-round Standards, educating them on the Year-round Standards relevant to their part of the camp's operation, outlining what a visit entails and providing them with information regarding the Ontario Camps Association.



# The Visit

## VISITORS

Visitors are OCA Members who volunteer to be Year-round Standards Visitors. They are senior professionals and have been in the camp industry for many years. Year-round Standards Visitors must attend yearly training as each year new information is added to the Year-round Standards. Many Visitors are camp directors and understand the importance of accreditation and the scope of laws, regulations and procedures of camps. At times, senior Visitors may be accompanied by Junior Visitors. Junior Visitors are training to become Visitors. They must attend training sessions and complete practical training time on Visits with senior Visitors.

## THE VISIT

Each visit is unique, and dependent on the camp, its programmes and its size, along with the experience of the visitor and what is observed at the time. The following section describes what might take place on a typical visit, but may not apply in all circumstances, except as otherwise required by the Standards.

Accreditation Visits occur on a typical camp programme day and often require a minimum of four to five hours. Visitors usually arrive during or shortly after breakfast at overnight camps or during opening activities at day camps. They will spend the morning touring, observing and learning about the camp.

Visitors will observe living areas including sleeping accommodations for campers, groups and staff; food preparation and dining areas; aquatic activity areas; health care areas; vehicles used for transportation and/or watercraft used for camp activities; maintenance and fuel storage areas; programme and activity areas; and the camp office. During the tour, the Visitor should be able to talk with staff and campers and visit with the whole camp during a meal or a camp-wide activity.

Following the camp tour, Visitors will meet with the camp director to determine compliance with each Standard that applies to the camp. Written documentation, such as policies and procedures, staff training schedules and topics, logs, certificates, staff handbooks, etc., should be available for the Visitor to review.

**NOTE: Both parties are responsible for ensuring that all questions are answered. ALL "NO" AND "NOT APPLICABLE" ANSWERS SHOULD BE DISCUSSED AND A FULL, DETAILED EXPLANATION WRITTEN BY THE DIRECTOR AND VISITOR.**

# After the Visit: Criteria for Accreditation or Re-accreditation

A camp must comply with 100% of all applicable Mandatory Standards. A camp must also comply with 90% of the Recommended Standards in each section. However, in a section where one "NO" response brings the camp below 90% compliance, then one "NO" response will be allowed.

Camps that comply with 100% of all applicable Mandatory Standards and 90% of the Recommended Standards in each section of the Year-round Standards will be accredited or re-accredited.

Below are steps that may be taken regarding a camp's status in the accreditation process after a Standards Visit.

**NOTE: For each section where the number of applicable Recommended Standards has not been met, it will equate to an additional Mandatory Standard being answered 'NO'.**

If a camp does not meet the criteria for Accreditation, the Standards Committee will conduct a review.

This review may involve personal contact with the owner/director of the camp and the Visitor. The contents of the review, the evaluation of the Standards Committee, and its recommendation will be forwarded to the OCA Board.

Please be aware that the Possible Outcomes (listed in the column on page 9 and 10) are only guidelines for the Standards Committee to use when making recommendations to the OCA's Board of Directors; the final decision about a camp's status in the accreditation process is at the sole discretion of the Board and may vary from the possible outcomes listed below.

The Board may revoke the membership of any camp if, in the opinion of the Board, the continued membership of the camp is detrimental to the OCA or if the camp does not adhere to the objectives, goals or Standards of the OCA. The camp may appeal such a decision of the Board.

## PROVISIONAL ONE (P1) CAMPS:

- *May advance to P2 status if they have answered:*



"YES" to all but three applicable Mandatory Standards.

- *May remain at P1 status if they have answered:*



"NO" to more than three applicable Mandatory Standards.

## PROVISIONAL TWO (P2) CAMPS:

- *May become accredited for four years if they have answered:*



"YES" to all applicable Mandatory Standards.

- *May become accredited for one year if they have answered:*



"NO" to one applicable Mandatory Standard AND they provide a satisfactory letter of response.


- *May remain at P2 status if they have answered:*




"NO" to more than one applicable Mandatory Standard.


## ACCREDITED CAMPS

- *May be re-accredited for four years if they have answered:*


 **"YES"** to all applicable Mandatory Standards;  
OR

 **"NO"** to one applicable Mandatory Standard AND they provide a satisfactory letter of response.


- *May be re-accredited for one year if they have answered:*

 **"NO"** to two to three applicable Mandatory Standards AND they provide a satisfactory letter of response;


OR

 **"NO"** to one to two applicable Mandatory Standards **PLUS** have a history of previous deficiencies which have not been addressed AND they provide a satisfactory letter of response.

- *May revert back to P2 status if they have answered:*

 **"NO"** to four or more applicable Mandatory Standards;

OR

 **"NO"** to three applicable Mandatory Standards **PLUS** have a history of previous deficiencies which have not been addressed.

## BOARD RESPONSES

The Board must act in one of the following ways:

1. The camp will be accredited or re-accredited as a Camp Member for four years.
2. The Board will require a Letter of Response (LOR) from the camp to show evidence of its intent to comply with the Year-round Standards before accreditation or re-accreditation is given for four years.
3. The Board will require a Letter of Response (LOR) from the camp to show evidence of its intent to comply with the Year-round Standards before accreditation or re-accreditation is given for one year and the camp is re-visited the following year. **NOTE: If your camp is re-visited, there will be a charge of \$150.**
4. The camp does not become accredited and will remain as a Provisional Applicant or the accredited camp will revert back to Provisional status.

## NOTIFICATION

Each camp Visited will receive a letter from the OCA office providing the Board's decision on the camp's membership status.

## ACCREDITATION RESPONSIBILITIES

Accredited camps must display the "OCA Accredited Camp" logo in the following locations:

- website;
- printed marketing materials;
- camp manuals (plus information regarding the OCA in camp manuals); and,
- electronic communications as part of the signature.

## APPEALS

A member camp may appeal the Board's decision.

The member camp and the President agree to a mutually acceptable date for the camp member to meet with the Board at the OCA office. The camp may then present evidence to challenge the findings of the Standards Committee and the Board's decision. The Standards Committee may attend the meeting.

## RE-VISITS

A camp may be re-visited at any time, as determined by the Standards Committee and OCA office. An accreditation visit may be scheduled in one of the following scenarios:

- Four years have passed since the last visit;
- The camp was not accredited in the previous year's visit;
- The camp remained accredited but had to comply with Standards listed in a Letter of Response; or
- The camp is a Provisional One or Provisional Two applicant.

## REMOVAL OF ACCREDITATION

The OCA Board on the recommendation of the Standards Committee may remove a camp's accreditation status when one or more of the following occurs:

- A camp refuses to schedule an accreditation visit;
- A Visit occurs, however, the minimum criteria established for accreditation are not met; or,
- A camp does not agree to the annual Membership Agreement terms.

## FORMAT OF YEAR-ROUND STANDARDS

Mandatory Year-round Standards are easily recognized in each section as the text is bolded within the boxes listing the Standards. Year-round Standards that are recommended are deemed "Best Practises" by the Association and its Members and are in regular type and are also listed with the Mandatory Year-round Standards in numerical order within each section.

Each Mandatory and Recommended Year-round Standard requires a "YES", "NO" or "NOT APPLICABLE" (NA) response. Occasionally, where a question is relevant to two sections of the Standards, the question is repeated for the benefit of informing the different staff in the separate areas. In some cases, explanatory statements follow the question to provide the reason behind the Standard and/or to facilitate understanding. To achieve or maintain accreditation, a camp must comply with 100% of all applicable Mandatory Standards. A camp must also comply with 90% of the Recommended Standards in each section. However, in a section where one "NO" response brings the camp below 90% compliance, then one "NO" response will be allowed. Where a camp answers a Mandatory or Recommended Standard as "NO" or "NOT APPLICABLE", a written explanation is required.

## REVISITS MAY ALSO OCCUR DUE TO...

- a camp moving to a new site;
- a new owner;
- a new on-site director;
- factors related to accreditation; or,
- complaints.

**NOTE: Both parties are responsible for ensuring that all questions are answered. ALL "NO" AND "NOT APPLICABLE" ANSWERS SHOULD BE DISCUSSED AND A FULL, DETAILED EXPLANATION WRITTEN BY THE DIRECTOR AND VISITOR.**

## CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION AND COMPLIANCE DEMONSTRATION

Below each list of Year-round Standards are two additional designated sections:

1. **Contextual Education:** Contextual education provides camp directors/owners/operators and Visitors assistance in understanding the terminology of the Standard, education regarding the Standard and its intent. The goal of Contextual Education is to bring consistency to the answers.
2. **Compliance Demonstration:** The Compliance demonstration identifies for camp directors/owners/operators and Visitors the following:
  - **Written Documentation:** Written policies and procedures that must be seen by the Visitor when specified by a Standard.
  - **Visitor Interviews:** Procedures or policies not specified in the Standards to be in writing may be described by the camp director/owner/operator, staff or campers.
  - **Visitor Observation:** The Visitors' tour of the camp will give them an informal opportunity to observe facilities, interactions, signage, etc., and the implementation of policies and procedures in camp programmes. Standards required to be in practise or to be easily observed are to be verified by the Visitor through discussion or observation to ascertain that the implementation has occurred.

## CAMP OPERATIONS VARIATIONS

The Year-round Standards apply to all operations and programmes of a camp, except in the case of single-day events and programme areas with no applicable standards. For the purposes of these Standards the four following modes of operation are defined:

- **Day Camps:** Sessions vary in length. The programme is operated and staffed by the camp, and the supervision of individual campers is a camp responsibility. The camper goes home to a parent or guardian each night, except for an occasional overnight.
- **Overnight Camps:** Sessions vary in length. The programme is operated and staffed by the camp, and the supervision of individual campers is a camp responsibility. Campers stay overnight, and the camp is responsible for campers 24 hours a day. Tripping and travel camp programmes are types of overnight camps that may not have a home base location. Such programmes run as an extension of overnight camps or may be an exclusive tripping or travelling camp, specializing only in tripping, travelling or touring programmes.



- **Short-Term Programmes:** Programmes and operational services that are operated and staffed primarily by the camp outside the summer season (September to June). Sessions vary in length. The programme is operated and staffed by the camp, and the supervision of individual participants during camp programmes is primarily a camp responsibility. Supervision of the participants during non-programmed times or overnight may be the responsibility of third parties or by the camp. These may include educational programmes (school groups), weekend retreats, skill-training weekends and family camp programmes. The camp staff for these programmes are sometimes supplemented by adults from the participating groups.
- **Rentals:** Sessions vary in length. Rentals are groups or programmes that rent or lease the camp's facilities, and perhaps some services, to operate their own events, camp programmes or retreats. Rental groups may include other camps, clubs, youth groups, individuals and outdoor education programmes run by other groups (third party) or specialty programmes that operate their programmes at a camp's facility. The camp may be contracted for some staff and services, such as lifeguards or food service, but the primary responsibility for the participants' supervision and general programming is with the rental group.

In the margins of the Year-round Standards, applicable categories above are listed, indicating to which of the categories each standard applies.



Camp Can-Aqua

**ACCREDITED  
MEMBER**



**Ontario Camps Association**

*Camps Parents Trust*

## Code of Professional Ethics

**Communication:** We shall be professional and accurate in all communication to staff, campers and families/guardians, to maintain confidentiality, to eliminate misunderstanding, and to prevent recruitment of another camp's staff. Camps must also refrain from using another camp's name in their literature and marketing materials without written consent.

**Advertising:** We shall ensure that all programmes, facilities and services are accurately advertised.

All accredited member camps agree to use either the approved Association logo or the statement "Accredited Member of the Ontario Camps Association" in all advertising.

**Money:** We shall conduct all financial dealings according to legal and fair business practises.

**Privacy:** We shall protect the confidentiality of campers, parents and staff.

**Employment:** We shall ask all applicants if they have been employed by another camp. If so, the Director will, after obtaining consent, contact the previous Director for reference and good character.

**Requests:** We shall request approval of the camp owner and/or director for the use of files, lists, equipment and supplies of another camp, whether it is in operation or not.



*Upper Canada Village Time Travellers Camp*