

# Camp Kawartha & The Kawartha Outdoor Education Centre

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## Camp Kawartha – Accessibility Case Study for OCA

Camp Kawartha is an award-winning outdoor education centre and summer camp. Our mission is to inspire environmental leaders and stewards of all ages through dynamic, accessible, year-round outdoor programming and powerful partnerships. We also recognize that camping and outdoor activities should be available to everyone and we've been working hard to reach a broader complement of children who, because of mobility issues, might otherwise not be able to experience the magic of summer camp and outdoor education.

A focus on including those with disabilities/challenges came into sharper focus with the **advent of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**. This legislation helped us to re-examine our culture as a camp. Were we being as inclusive as we could be? Are there barriers that are preventing all children from accessing all aspects of camp?

**First steps included policy development, site reviews, and a staff training assessment.** We acknowledged that we were already doing things that provided for accessibility and inclusivity -- over the years the Camp has welcomed staff members who have had physical and learning disabilities; there have been significant upgrades to cabins and new builds to make them accessible; staff members have been provided with training to help them understand accommodations for those with physical needs, learning behaviours, and mental health challenges. Annual AODA requirements emphasized regular examination.

**We have reached out to the community to develop a strong relationship with the local Disabilities Council.** They have been an amazing resource and are eager to help. **An audit of our sites has proved invaluable.** Recommendations in the audit range from regrading slopes around the main camp site, to including charge stations in new builds, to adding reflective tape to built-spaces where there are changes in footfall levels.

We recognized that these recommended actions are not the kinds of things we ordinarily would think of, nor can we truly appreciate their importance without someone who regularly experiences these barriers. The idea of charging stations made us give our heads a shake because we had never considered it, but what a marvelous idea.

Currently **we are negotiating with the Disabilities Council Board members to have a representative sit on our Board of Directors.** Bringing that 'voice' to the Board level will add significantly to the

governance of the Camp and help guide our decision-making as we move into a \$3 million capital campaign.

Recently, we added two significant features -- **an accessible climbing wall** to accommodate those in wheelchairs, with prosthetics, and with other physical challenges; and **a graded pathway to our beachfront**. With the latter we will add a ramped dock with Hoyer Lift in the spring to complete the project. These additions are significant both in terms of inclusivity and accessibility, but also as investments.

The accessible wall, by way of example, cost \$89,000.00. We were able to secure seven funders who saw the value in this unique addition and of including campers with disabilities. As a result, the Camp's costs were significantly reduced. Without those funders, constructing an accessible wall would not have happened.

We highly recommend an audit, then the development of an accessibility plan. It is important to phase in elements of the plan overtime so that the magnitude of these changes does not become daunting and overwhelming. This means setting clear priorities with targets and timelines. For example, just sourcing sufficient funding from a variety of sources took more than a year.

The Disabilities Council has emphasized to us many things. One important point that should be emphasized is that being disabled does not mean one thing – disabilities have a range. It doesn't just mean those in a wheel chair – it also means those who cannot see, cannot hear, cannot read, or who have anxiety. We keep this front and centre as we move through the recommendations in our audit.

There is no fixed point when you become truly accessible. Instead it is a mindset that any organization should be continually striving towards. And the best way to do this is to regularly seek feedback, advice and guidance from those who encounter barriers. They are best positioned to help us break through those barriers.

Jacob Rodenburg  
Executive Director