

## Camp Ooch's New Accessible Dining Hall – Gatt's Lodge

Camp Oochigeas (Ooch) is a privately funded, volunteer-based organization that provides kids with, and affected by, childhood cancer with unique opportunities for growth through challenging, fun, enriching and magical experience. Ooch currently serves over 1,800 children and their families year-round. In addition to overnight camp, Ooch offers In-Hospital programs daily at SickKids, London Children's, McMaster Children's, and In-City programs and day camps weekly across the province. All programs come at no cost to families.

Currently 2,400 children affected by cancer in Ontario are not accessing oncology camp programs. To help meet this need Ooch expanded its provincial reach and embarked on an ambitious capital campaign to ensure no eligible child is ever turned away. This overnight camp expansion provided additional opportunities for Ooch to be a leader in providing accessible camping experiences. The Ooch team visited 15 other camps, many in Ontario, to learn about best practices. As well, Ooch facilitated working groups to engage campers, parents, volunteers and medical staff to gain their insights.

The campers who come through Ooch's gates are in all stages of their cancer experience and as such creating spaces that are accessible to all was and remains a top priority. Below are a few of the highlights of how Ooch's new dining hall, Gatt's Lodge, supports inclusivity and accessibility:

- In all areas land was graded to meet building edges at ground level. This allows all participants to access buildings the *same way* and together.
- There is extended spacing between all tables and throughout the dining hall to provide easy movability for participants using wheelchairs and walkers.
- Instead of the traditional dining hall 'long bench' use, several shorter benches are used instead. This allows easy removal of seating sections, and therefore participants with mobility devices such as wheelchairs are able to choose where they want to sit – versus having the only option of placing those in wheelchairs at the ends of tables.
- Dining tables are centre balanced and therefore a participant with a wheelchair or mobility support device can still "pull in" to the table without having the table legs in the way.
- The heights of tables, shelves, salad bars, soup stations etc. are all lower than traditional set ups.
- Windows are set as low as possible (but still built to code) so everyone can see through the windows and enjoy the view.
- The dining hall's 24 tables are arranged so they are evenly spaced and along a uniform grid. This allows Campers with visual impairments to easily "get to know the space" in a consistent and predictable way.
- Small overhead speakers are installed throughout the Dining Hall (versus the more traditional two speakers at the 'front' of the room set up) to provide even sound throughout. This is very helpful for participants with hearing impairments or sensitivities to sound.
- The dining hall ceiling was designed with intentional angles and substantial sound paneling to accommodate Campers with brain tumours, and others who may find the din of traditional indoor group gatherings overwhelming.
- To allow for the easier rolling of wheels (e.g. of mobility devices) along the outdoor terrain of the often uneven and rocky terrain of Muskoka, playground-grade woodchips cover the natural walkways and outdoor gathering spaces at Ooch's overnight camp.

