

## Claireville Day Camp

### **Can you tell me a bit about what makes your camp unique?**

We are the only fully outdoor day camp run by the City of Toronto, which includes inclusion (1:1) support as well as an adapted camp for youth with disabilities.

### **What percentage of your campers and/or staff has a disability?**

Out of approximately 250 campers, 10 of those would be in our Adapted Camp and 3 campers receiving 1:1 integration support. At this time we have 4 staff out of approximately 40 who have identified as having a disability or requiring extra support in order to perform their duties. So that would be approximately 10% of campers with visible/identified exceptionality and 10% of our staff with visible/identified exceptionality.

### **Do those campers participate fully in all programs and events?**

Yes, at all times all of these participants are encouraged to fully participate in all camp activities and events. With each camper we do our best to put measures into place that would allow a camper to participate but also know that if they are overwhelmed or need to take extra breaks from the activity or event then they can, there is always an alternative or a safe quiet place to go if they need some space of their own for a moment.

### **If yes, what do you need to do to make that possible?**

We set up meetings with parents and/or conduct a school or other program visit to meet the camper and observe them with their peers in advance to come up with profiles and game plans to ensure we have as much success as possible. We figure out what activities they enjoy and try to use those to entice them through the day. This also helps us to know what situations they may struggle with or where they will need extra support or encouragement in order to experience success. Observing them with their peers will assist us in planning how to integrate all campers successfully into their camp groups.

### **What are some of your accessibility best practices that other camps might learn from?**

The pre-camp meetings with the camper, their families and/or their teachers are key to ensuring consistency in each child's experience and continuity in the tools and practices used in every day life that they have come to rely on for success.

Including as many staff as possible in the Integration and Adapted Camp training has provided more of our staff with the tools and resources to work with all campers and be aware of different campers needs, whether they be visible or not. Practicing the techniques learned in training, in scenario settings from real experiences that our staff has faced over the years has been a great training tool as well.

Our staff are also trained in adapting activities, use of equipment to different ages and abilities for all the camp groups so that all camper can fully participate to the best of their abilities and have the opportunity to experience success.

**Can you tell me a success story about a camper/staff with a disability?**

We have had a male camper with us from the age of 6 years until this past summer, he is now 16, and he has struggled through the years with anger control issues. Having Autism and Asperger's, there have been barriers that he has had to overcome with social situations and learning to deal effectively with his emotions and reactions to various situations. This has caused struggles developing relationships and maintaining friendships in a school and camp setting. Through the summers we have worked through strategies to build his resilience, develop social skills, learn social cues along with the strategies his teachers and parents have shared with us.

This past spring (after doing our Counsellor in Training program last summer) he applied for a camp counsellor position successfully screened through to the interview process and passed the interview with flying colors. In doing this he has displayed how he has developed and learned problem solving, confidence, critical thinking and other interpersonal skills that as a younger child he has huge difficulty with.

**What challenges do you experience to fully including staff and/or campers with a range of disabilities?**

Finding a balance between ensuring that all campers and/or staff are benefiting and getting as much as possible out of the camp experience is the most important focus of our jobs. Enabling all to feel involved and find some level of success, as this is different for everyone.

**How do you train your staff so that can best support and engage your campers with disabilities?**

As said above, we send as many staff, all different levels, to as much of the special needs training as possible. This enables all our staff to support each other in a variety of ways. It gives even the newest staff member at least some level of understanding and a level of empathy when coming across a difficult or challenging situation. Whether that be with a camper or a colleague.

**What final message would you give to other camps working towards greater inclusion of people with disabilities?**

Some of the situations we come across are very challenging and it can be hard to find the right tools, resources or solutions to help someone be a part of the camp community but it so much more than worth it for both the staff and the campers. To see how young people have been able to learn, grow and thrive in a camp environment is truly wonderful.