

Camp Character
Description of Camp Activities
Meeting the Needs of Special Needs Youth

Camp Character: **13240 County Road 40, Park Rapids MN 56470**
Character Camp Dates: **August 19-22, 2012**
Cost: **\$650**

Camp Character focuses on providing training and curriculum to youth with special needs and mental health disorders. Youth will meet with other children who have similar pasts, learn life skills and social skills, have the opportunity to participate in a high and low ropes Challenge Course, play sports, swim, kayak, and much more. All activities are hands-on and team based to allow for acquiring new skills and practicing them in practical situations. The curriculum is modified to meet youth's special needs, ages, and attention span. The learning takes place in an outdoor classroom and is facilitated by teachers, social workers, and highly trained staff.

As a parent or professional, resources for children who have special needs can often be difficult to find. Camp Character provides opportunities where youth can develop meaningful relationships with others. Direct instruction of social skills occurs for approximately six hours each day. If you are looking for a place where your child will be surrounded by character development, and an opportunity to develop life skills, then look no further.

At the Camp Character, we incorporate hands-on activities into our teaching to make everything learned applicable to life. Camp Character will provide youth a 4:1 youth to staff ratio. Through teamwork activities and discussions, youth will learn to network with others and develop a community where they grow. Camp Character is one more piece of the puzzle of coming along side youth to help them reach their fullest potential.

Highlights that your child with special needs will acquire includes:

- Understanding his/her IEP
- Identifying triggers relating to anger and utilizing coping strategies
- Overcoming personal fears,
- Obtaining skills related to communication
- Building trust
- Working as a team with a diverse group of youth
- Etiquette skills and much more.

Emotional/Behavioral Disorder: Camp Character

The directors of the Camp Character have worked with students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders as lead teachers in public schools for a combination of 20 years. Youth will learn to identify their triggers for impulsivity and aggression, withdrawn behaviors, or disordered thought processes. Camp counselors are trained to use positive behavioral interventions including social conferencing, behavior breaks, setting limits with natural and logical consequences, and keeping structure daily. Functions of behaviors will be identified, along with antecedents to share with older youth and with parents of younger youth. Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day. The following are activities and curriculum to address these particular needs:

- 1.) **Rules and Expectations:** These are established on the first day of camp. All counselors reinforce these rules and expectations daily. Youth are held accountable for their actions and social conferencing when behaviors occur for self-reflection and positive replacement behaviors to be taught. These behavior skills are shared with parents as youth transition to their home and community after camp.
- 2.) **Teamwork Activities** to build cooperation, self-confidence, and team building among personalities:
 - a.) **High and Low Ropes Elements:** Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. They will experience pressure as they climb 35 feet in the air to overcome obstacles with five elements, work through fears, and realize that they cannot control all things in their environment.
 - b.) **Team Challenge:** Youth work together as a team to identify a name, participate in physical activities, and work under pressure.
 - c.) **Behavioral role-plays and service learning:** This includes projects at camp and the development of activities for their return home. Such activities are daily chores, recycling, cooking skills, and identifying jobs to be completed independently.
 - d.) **Team Decathlon:** This activity focuses on overcoming obstacles in search of building trust, friendships, and teamwork.
 - e.) **Talent Show:** Youth build self-confidence through singing, acting, sports, & skits.
- 3.) **Specifically Assigned Duties** for cabin cleaning, meal and snack preparation, and daily tasks. These skills replace the need for power and control over others and authority with positive outlets to receive validation for using power and control to better the lives with serving others.
- 4.) **Anger Management:** The triggers of anger are reviewed including teaching strategies to positively express anger. Some strategies include HALTS, journaling, physical exercise, self-reflection, breathing, the thermometer gauge, feelings collage, and goal setting.

Other Health Disability: Camp Character

(Example: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Fetal Alcohol Effects)

The directors of Camp Character have worked with students with a myriad of disabilities as lead teachers for a combination of 20 years. There are multiple diagnoses within this disability. The following are activities that focus on improving appropriate behaviors, boundaries, and life skills. The keys when addressing the needs of a youth with fetal alcohol syndrome, attention deficit, or hyper-activity focuses on providing activities that are hands-on, outdoor and recreation based, and movement oriented. Skills are reviewed for repetition and consistency. Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day.

- 1.) **Role Plays:** At multiple times throughout camp, staff will set up and act out role-plays that specifically focus on attention, focus, concentration, and respect. Visual cues are taught and reviewed for self-monitoring of behavior. These are shared with parents as well to integrate into other environments.
- 2.) **Tension Traverse and Porthole:** These two low elements provide an opportunity to problem solve as a team, understand personal pressure, and work cooperatively with others to have the team conquer each task.
- 3.) **Rules and Expectations:** These are established on the first day of camp. All counselors reinforce these rules and expectations daily. Youth are held accountable for their actions and social conferencing when behaviors occur for self-reflection and positive replacement behaviors to be taught. These behavior skills are shared with parents as youth transition to their home and community after camp.
- 4.) **The Team Challenge:** This activity focuses youth concentration while participating in a variety of outdoor activities, develop a team name, and participate in games of self-control.
- 5.) **Goal Setting:** Youth will take 30-45 minutes (depending on age) to determine personal goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Journaling and discussion will be incorporated. These tasks include self-control, stamina, and organizing materials in the environment.

Anxiety & Depression: Camp Character

Due to the diverse backgrounds of many youth with special needs, anxiety and depression have a deep impact on many of their lives. Camp Character offers a structured environment that provides youth with several types of activities that will teach coping strategies as well as helping them to realize their battle against these feelings are not unique. This camp provides an environment with a high staff to youth ratio to practice skills, receive reinforcement and redirections, and allow for small group discussion. Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day. The following activities are only a sample of what the staff at Camp Character will provide:

- 1.) **Small & large group discussion:** These social skills events are focused on themes of mental health, including sharing fears and anxieties by identifying them verbally and sharing coping strategies and personal stories with others.
- 2.) **Journaling & Self-Reflection:** Times are set up to create a journal, share an array of feelings, and select camp counselors to reflect with. These journals will teach youth to draw, write, compose poetry, or use music to positively express their anxiety and depression.
- 3.) **Exercise & Nutrition:** Research has shown the necessity of exercise in order to battle depression. Camp Character camp engages in highly supervised activities as well as break-out sessions focusing on particular types and the importance of exercise as a life skill. Exercise helps gain confidence, allow the mind to release worries, achieve more social interaction, and cope with anxiety and depression in a positive way. Healthy food choices are also taught, as well as incorporating exercise into their daily life as a positive outlet and a way to meet other peers.
- 4.) **Team Focused:** The vast majority of all activities completed at Camp Character are completed utilizing skills with other people. These learned skills help youth to adapt and achieve success which decreases the feelings of anxiety and depression. Cooperation, trust with others, and the need to communicate are necessary for the activities.
- 5.) **High and Low Ropes Elements:** Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. They will experience pressure as they climb 35 feet in the air to overcome obstacles with five elements, work through fears, and realize that they cannot control all things in their environment.
- 6.) **Feelings Collage:** Youth will identify their personal feelings, create a collage, and discuss it with others. They will identify what areas of their life cause them anxiety or sadness, and then replace it with positive thoughts or images using their collage as an outlet.

Reactive Attachment Disorder: Camp Character

Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD), which is also called “attachment disorder” affects many of the youth today. Children with attachment disorders struggle to forge emotional attachments to others, often because of serious disruptions in their early relationships. Programming that assists youth with this disability will be highly engaging, active and supervised. To reinforce skill development and to provide this highly supervised environment, Camp Character provides a youth to staff ratio of 4:1 or better. Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day. Camp Character offers a variety of activities that begin to address these needs including:

- 1.) **Role Plays**: Staff and youth work together to develop situations that reflect experiences that they may feel or go through. Youth will be asked to problem solve each role play and express how they would use coping skills and self-talk to work through the situations.
- 2.) **Small group discussion**: In two sessions, staff from Camp Character will discuss boundaries with strangers and friends, family structure, acceptance, and allow youth the opportunity to share thoughts and feelings from their past. Visual cues including “bubble” or personal boundaries will be taught, modeled, and practiced.
- 3.) **“Building a Family-Building a Home”**: **Group** discussion and debriefing will focus on actions, words, and the many types of communications. Nonverbal and verbal communication skills will be role played and taught. Youth will learn to identify how to begin to identify trust, define a family, and share these feelings.
- 4.) **Trust Relays**: This activity develops trust and support among youth, including similar activities that will be shared with the parents to incorporate at home and discuss as well. These relays will include the trust fall, Sherpa walk, Wind in the Willows, and building a stretcher carry.
- 5.) **High and Low Ropes Elements**: Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. They will experience pressure as they climb 35 feet in the air to overcome obstacles with five elements, work through fears, and realize that they cannot control all things in their environment.

Oppositional/Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder: Camp Character

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is a condition in which a child displays an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, hostile, or other behaviors toward people in authority. Camp Character establishes routine, rules, and expectations immediately. Youth are given a verbal warning for any misbehavior and then a break for a short period of free time if they choose not to follow directions. Positive praise and modeling of appropriate behaviors are consistently applied to all settings. The philosophy of PC2 is taught at Camp Character. (My power, my change, my choice.) Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day. Camp Character offers a variety of activities that begin to address these needs including:

- 1.) **PC2=My power, my change, my choice.** Youth are taught to identify the elements that they have power and control over in their life, including identifying what elements they cannot control. This includes parents, teachers, siblings, etc. Youth are then taught about positive versus negative choices and consequences versus privileges. Role plays are used to model a change in behavior and this equation is used at all camp activities and discussions.
- 2.) **Rules and expectations** are established on the first day of camp. All counselors reinforce these rules and expectations daily. Youth are held accountable for their actions using natural and logical consequences and social conferencing when behaviors occur for self-reflection and positive replacement behaviors to be taught. Positive self-control is highlighted daily and youth are taught to take control of their lives.
- 3.) **Canoe Trip:** Youth take a canoe adventure down a river with staff. Youth are placed in canoes and kayaks and will be given paddles that are the incorrect size or type of paddle needed. The trip is set up so that youth must realize that they cannot control the paddle or the other youth in their boat, but they must work together to remain calm and problem solve to finish the voyage. Staff model these behaviors next to the youth and help them problem solve. Verbal praise is used and debriefing occurs with all youth after the trip is complete.
- 4.) **High and Low Ropes Elements:** Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. They will experience pressure as they climb 35 feet in the air to overcome obstacles with five elements, work through fears, and realize that they cannot control all things in their environment.
- 5.) **Anger Management:** The triggers of anger are reviewed including teaching strategies to positively express anger. Some strategies include HALTS, heart activity, journaling, physical exercise, self-reflection, breathing, the thermometer gauge, feelings collage, and goal setting.

Learning Disabilities: Camp Character

The directors of Camp Character have worked with students with special needs in public schools for a combination of 20 years. Sarah Coumbe-Guida works with students ages 5-12 and Travis Guida works with high school youth. Older youth will learn about the IEP process and understanding their disability and services available throughout their school years. Youth will also learn transition and job skills. Ninety-five percent of the activities at Camp Character are hands-on, team building, and encourage group discussion. Youth will learn self-confidence, self-advocacy, and how to use coping skills to listen, comprehend, and repeat directions. Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day. The following activities will be modified to be age appropriate. Camp Character offers a variety of activities that begin to address these needs including:

- 1.) **IEP Talk:** Older youth will learn what goals and objectives are, transition services, modifications, accommodations, and how to identify their levels of performance. A role play/mock IEP meeting will be reviewed along with a question and answering time. The goal is to educate youth on their disabilities and help them advocate for their needs.
- 2.) **Choices and Peer Pressure:** Time will be devoted to build self-esteem, self awareness, and self-advocacy. Youth will be able to develop a daily list of activities to care for themselves and identify how to access resources at home and in the community.
- 3.) **Acceptance Activity:** An activity will occur that helps youth see the differences as unique opportunities and gifts in others. This will include self-reflections, sharing, and compliments given by others in the group.
- 4.) **Goal Setting:** Youth will take 30-45 minutes (depending on age) to determine personal goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Journaling and discussion will be incorporated. These tasks include self-control, stamina, and organizing materials in the environment.
- 5.) **High and Low Ropes Elements:** Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. They will experience pressure as they climb 35 feet in the air to overcome obstacles with five elements, work through fears, and realize that they cannot control all things in their environment.

Developmental/Cognitive Disability: Camp Character

Areas that affect youth with developmental or cognitive disabilities are independent living skills, self-care, learning, self-direction, and receptive and expressive language skills. Sarah Coumbe-Guida has a special education license in developmental cognitive disabilities. She has worked with students with special needs for 13 years. Travis Guida is a work experience coordinator and works with youth for transition, life skills, and job skills both at school and in the community. At Camp Character, youth will be able to practice life skills, social skills, transition, and learn in an environment that is safe, accepting, and motivating. Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day. Camp Character offers a variety of activities that begin to address these needs including:

- 1.) **IEP Talk:** Older youth will learn what goals and objectives are, transition services, modifications, accommodations, and how to identify their levels of performance. A role play/mock IEP meeting will be reviewed along with a question and answer time. The goal is to educate youth on their disabilities and help them advocate for their needs.
- 2.) **Service Learning:** Daily tasks of cabin clean up, organizing rooms and materials, daily schedule reviews, and preparation of meals and snacks is integrated into each day. These life skills and independent living skills are taught, modeled, and reinforced. Healthy food choices are also reviewed when planning for meals and serving others.
- 3.) **Etiquette Skills and Role Plays:** Etiquette skills are taught including using table manners, interview skills, introductions, interacting with peers and adults, and much more. Role plays are completed by staff for youth to observe, identify skills, and then practice these skills in the controlled environment. Youth then identify places that they can use these skills at home, in the community, and in the school settings. The etiquette skills are reinforced throughout camp and youth verbally identify them and then practice with peers and staff.
- 4.) **Talent Show and Team Activities:** There are multiple activities daily that youth will practice and master. These will include teaming with 6-8 other youth to build sandcastles, kayak, perform in a talent show, and complete obstacle courses. Teams are set up for success, multi-age groups, and skill levels. Youth work to motivate others, accept one another, and build on their own personal strengths.
- 5.) **Low Ropes Elements:** Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. These include the Log Shuffle, Spider Web, Islands, and Meuse.

Autism/Asperger's Syndrome: Camp Character

Youth with Autism or Asperger's Syndrome are not able to consistently identify social cues, read body language, or initiate or maintain conversations with peers or adults. Many youth do not respond well to changes in routine and often lack empathy for the feelings of others. At Camp Character, youth will be able to work directly on social skills and curriculum to meet their needs for about 6 hours per camp day. The positive benefit is that as these youth learn new social skills, they are able to apply them to other settings at camp when working with youth and counselors. These skills are reinforced and modeled during all activities. The following are examples of activities to assist youth with these needs:

- 1.) **Etiquette Skills and Role Plays:** Etiquette skills are taught including using table manners, interview skills, introductions, interacting with peers and adults, and much more. Role plays are completed by staff for youth to observe, identify skills, and then practice these skills in the controlled environment. Youth then identify places that they can use these skills at home, in the community, and in the school settings. The etiquette skills are reinforced throughout camp and youth verbally identify them and then practice with peers and staff.
- 2.) **Acceptance Activity:** An activity will occur that helps youth see the differences as unique opportunities and gifts in others. This will include self-reflections, sharing, and compliments given by others in the group. Youth will use eye contact and need to identify the strengths in others and be able to give specific compliments.
- 3.) **Low Ropes Elements:** Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. The Wild Woozy, Trust Fall, All Aboard, and Spider Web will be used to teach trust with others, self-confidence, social skills, reading body language during activities, and problem solving.
- 4.) **Stretcher Carry:** Youth work in groups of 6-8 kids. They create a stretcher to transfer team members. They work cooperatively while talking about the needs of others. These team activities help youth with this disability to apply their social skills.
- 5.) **Conversation Builders:** Youth ask specific questions to one another during meal times. They are encouraged to use eye contact, ask questions, and reply to questions asked of them. They learn to initiate friendships with others.
- 6.) **Communication Skills:** Youth will learn how to read the body language of others, identify feelings associated with body language, and respond to the feelings of others during small group discussions and team activities. They will learn to look to their peers to identify the social cues used in each setting and this will be verbally taught when each activity transitions for additional practice.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: Camp Character

Youth will learn to identify thoughts about the world and themselves that are making them feel afraid or upset. Youth will learn to replace these thoughts with more accurate and less distressing thoughts, using individual and team activities. Youth also learn ways to cope with feelings such as anger, guilt, and fear. Direct instruction of social skills training is approximately 6 hours per camp day. Activities that address this individual need include:

- 1) **One-on-one and large group discussions:** In structured discussions, staff will speak in general terms about defining fear, loss, and rejection. They will give youth the opportunity to discuss their own feelings and personal experiences. These opportunities include journaling, group discussions, and small group time with children with similar feelings. This can help youth cope with their symptoms, memories, and other components of their life. Youth will also learn valuable coping strategies. These discussions will also help identify what triggers stressful memories and other symptoms.
- 2) **High and Low Ropes Elements:** Youth will work together with their team to complete a combination of 8 low elements, problem solve, and communicate their ideas. They will experience pressure as they climb 35 feet in the air to overcome obstacles with five elements, work through fears, and realize that they cannot control all things in their environment.
- 3) **Role Plays:** Staff will act out various situations through skits of fear, rejection, trauma, and loss youth will see and experience others that feel the way many of them feel. Youth will be asked to problem solve each role play and express how they would use coping skills and self-talk to work through the situations.
- 4) **Canoe Trip:** This experience will allow youth to be placed into stressful situations that are highly supervised. Youth will begin to heal wounds and trauma they have experienced. Self-talk and verbal replacement will be used to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts as they paddle down a river and back up using teamwork, a combination of kayaks and canoes, and paddles that force them to work together. Youth will need to switch places and boats in the shallow part of the river. These events cause some stress and staff talk through these experiences to allow youth to problem solve, use their coping skills, and debrief on the experience and allow for personal growth.