

### The CAMP-WE-CAN, Inc. Fund

Laughter echoed from the campgrounds at the Geneva Center near Rochester as a group of volunteers and campers wearing brightly colored shirts speckled the area. Some rode horses; others took turns aiming at bowling pins. Some even danced and made tie-dye t-shirts. Regardless of the activity, everyone wore a smile. CAMP WE CAN is held each summer and is a day filled with fun activities that are designed for individuals with special needs, which allows them to experience a fun and positive social environment with an exciting camp atmosphere.

“Around here, our camp’s emphasis is on ability, not disability,” Teri Carr, one of the camp’s directors, said. “We want each of our campers to feel like they are a king or queen for the day.”

And that’s exactly what entices campers like Madysen Wagoner who said that she loves coming to camp every year.

“It’s so much fun,” she exclaimed. “I love the tie-dye.”

Another camper wore his camp shirt to bed the night before camp because he couldn’t wait to go, Teri said.

“You would be blown away by the number of comments we get back from parents, caregivers, or the campers themselves,” Teri says. “The next day, as they are leaving they’ll say, ‘I’ll be ready for next year.’”

The idea for the camp was developed due to Teri’s youngest child, Sidneigh, who wanted to volunteer her time in camps like her older sisters but was continuously rejected because of her special needs condition. In 2002, Teri, her sister Jodie Simpson, and local special education teacher Tina Hackworth created a camp dedicated to children with special needs. The first year, eight campers attended the camp, and since then, the camp has continued to grow. In 2010, the camp featured a day just for adults.

The number of volunteers has also increased dramatically. There are enough helping hands to provide at least two volunteers for every camper. Garth Simpson, a seven-year volunteer, says it’s inspiring to see so many people willing to help as the camp continues to grow.



“You come out here, and not only are you able to make a difference, but you have a great time doing it. It makes you feel good about yourself because you are helping someone else achieve their goals,” he said.

Another volunteer, Ryleigh Carr, says the camp is a unique experience that campers in Indiana can’t get anywhere else.

“You can’t put a price, statement, or any single word on how valuable this camp is to the community,” she said. “This is something they look forward to every year.”

Carr said that the grants and donations put forth by the Northern Indiana Community Foundation are an integral part of the camp and that they couldn’t provide this special day for campers without their assistance. “The gifts provided by the NICF enable us to help these kids and provide for them,” she said. “No price can be placed on the happiness that CAMP WE CAN brings to these kids and nothing can compare to the bright and cheerful smiles that it brings to their faces.”

