



Camp Akeela Circular



A Letter from Debbie and Eric

A mother of an Akeela camper recently sent us the link to a New York Times article about school bullying. The author explains how quirky children and teens – those who learn differently or have unusual mannerisms or who don't share interests with most of their classmates – are much more vulnerable to teasing and bullying at school. Of course, this wasn't news to us. Many of our Akeela campers feel that school represents a social world that can be fast-paced, cruel and unforgiving. They tell us that lunch and recess (and often gym class) are the hardest times of day. During class, although they may get funny looks for shouting out the right answers or not wearing the most up-to-date fashions, at least a teacher is there to intercede. In the cafeteria, they're expected to navigate social situations on their own. For our campers, this can be extremely difficult. Where should they sit? Who can they talk to? What should they talk about?



At our final campfire on the last night of the camp session, we take some time to reflect upon the time we've spent together as a community. We talk about all of the campers' wonderful accomplishments: becoming more independent, leaving home for three and a half weeks, going without video games!, cleaning their cabins every morning, making new friends, trying new activities and pushing themselves to do things out of their comfort zone. We encourage them to remember how accepted and loved they feel in that moment, the final night of camp. We tell them that we know how hard school can be at times and that not everyone they encounter will appreciate them for who they are. We tell them, "When you have a bad day, when someone is unkind, close your eyes and imagine you're back on Miller Pond surrounded by friends who really care about you."

As camp professionals, we believe that all children need to have experiences away from home where they feel successful, where they know that they are likable, where they are accepted for who they are. For our campers, that's even more true. Children need to have experiences in safe environments where they can learn and grow, including learning how to fail. Those experiences give them the confidence and skills to manage the "real world", where people can be so unkind.

Debbie Eric

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IMPORTANT 2013 DATES

First Session:
June 23 - July 17

Second Session:
July 20 - August 13

Visiting Days:
July 17 and August 13

Family Camp:
August 16 – August 22

STAFF UPDATES

Laura G. has been working at a preschool for autistic children and is currently taking a course in ABA. She has enjoyed learning about the wealth of applications it has to offer. She's been craving the "Akeela Spirit" these past couple weeks, and will be headed to Vermont for thanksgiving at Grandma Greene's in about a month. ... **Laura's sister Anna G.** is finishing up with the last of her classes and graduating in the spring. She's now starting graduate school applications for Speech-Language Pathology. ... **Alley L.** is back at school in Indiana taking classes and she'd like her fellow LARPer to know that she has kept Dr. Octagonapus alive and uses her noodle sword to attack her friends. She also has a bunch of drawings and artwork from her campers that she has hung up in her room. ... **Christine B.** moved to Burlington, Vermont and is working as a behavior interventionist in a third grade classroom. She is enjoying the mountains and the lake and is looking forward to the snow! ... **Katie O.** has started her job at the Cleveland Clinic Autism School as a behavioral therapist in the preschool and will be moving to Cleveland in December. ... **Justine E.** has been teaching English at an elementary school in Jinju, South Korea for the last couple of months and will be there for one more month until she returns home. ... **Jared E.** left for Hungary after camp where he is spending three months studying cognitive science. He will then travel to live in a "hippie commune" in Finland, a monastery in France and a farm in Spain. ... **Savannah W.** has moved to Spain to work as an Assistant Teacher in English language classrooms in a small village in northern coast of Cantabria. She's been enjoying immersing herself in Spanish culture, learning a new language, and traveling. This winter she plans to apply to graduate school programs for a Masters of Secondary Education in English and literature. ... **Harry C.** and **David C.** went to visit **Alex R.** in Connecticut before they returned to England. Alex took them to their first baseball game! ... **John-Robert I.** is in his second semester of graduate school and has begun his Master's of Counseling program. With his degree, he hopes to become a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). He and **Marcos S.** recently did a Tough Mudder (an 11-mile, 25 obstacle course) and completed it in 4.5 hours. ... After camp, **Meghan C.** returned to D.C. for her second year at American University. She also began interning at an organization called Casey Trees, which works to restore the DC tree canopy. ... **Katie F., Allison P.,** and **James D.** have all moved to Rhode Island and joined **Mike D.** and **Naomi P.** at Middlebridge School. ... **Rachel F.** is in Pittsburgh working with 6-8 year olds at the Children's Institute as a teacher aide in an autism classroom. She loves it but misses camp terribly! ... **Keith Y.** is busy with research and teaching at his university. He's also planning a winter climbing trip in Scotland.



SAVE THE DATE

Akeela Reunion

Saturday, February 2, 2013

12:00 - 2:00 pm • West Hartford, CT

We hope you will join us for our 2nd annual Akeela Reunion! Come reconnect with friends and staff.
More details to come soon!

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

To those who were able to complete the post-camp parent and camper surveys: Thank you so much! We really appreciate all of the time and effort that you gave. Most importantly, you offered some wonderful constructive feedback for how to make Akeela better. We take all of your ideas very seriously and promise to work hard to improve camp and to exceed expectations!



FUNDRAISER RESULTS



POISE

We are proud to announce that through their participation in our POISE-a-thon community service events, Akeela campers raised over \$11,000 for charity this summer. All of these donations will go directly to camper scholarships at Akeela, MGH Aspire or other similar camp programs. Thank you all for your participation and generosity.

(If your child participated in the POISE-a-thon and you have not yet had an opportunity to send your corresponding donation, it's not too late! Just let us know if you need another copy of your pledge sheet. Thanks!)

Many contributors to POISE don't have the first-hand experience that Akeela parents do of the power of summer camp. For them, POISE recently sent the following letter and we thought you would enjoy reading it as well.

October 20, 2012

Dear Friend,

We wanted to take this opportunity to thank you again for your generous donation to POISE, a charity that supplies camp scholarships to children with Asperger's Syndrome and related challenges. This past summer, 7 families were able to send their children to camp because of your commitment to this unique and wonderful population of children. Each family received between \$2000 and \$5000 towards tuition at one of two camps: Camp Akeela and MGH Aspire (formerly called YouthCare). Akeela is a 3 ½ week residential program in Vermont and Aspire is a 7 week day camp in the Boston area. These are both world-class organizations that offer nothing short of life-changing experiences for youth. With your help, POISE will continue to grow and we hope to work with more camp programs in the near future.

To help give you a sense of the impact you have made on the lives of children, here are some thoughts that scholarship recipients have asked us to share with you (with all names changed for anonymity):

"Joanna's experience at camp has been transforming. We credit so much of her growth, her emerging from within, to her time at camp. From someone who might reluctantly participate to someone takes a leadership role is a major shift in behavior. We have watched in joy as this process happened for our daughter. The time and staff at camp have been integral to her young life."

"We all hold hopes and dreams for our children and it can be difficult to accept that they need help that we can't give them. When help is available but out of reach financially, you are at a loss as a parent and there's a hole in your heart. The POISE scholarship program has been a godsend and without it camp would not have been possible. Thank you."

"Chris has had a very difficult time fitting in and feeling comfortable in many environments and camp made him feel strong, worthy, wanted and confident enough to be the person he really is. Camp is a place to come together with a trained, experienced staff who give them the camp experience while teaching them social, life and independence skills without the judgment that generally accompanies daily life with these struggles. If it weren't for the scholarship that was extended to my son from POISE, he never would have been able to attend camp."

"It is such a wonderful peace of mind for me, as a parent of a child with Asperger's Syndrome, to know that there is a loving, nurturing, socially acceptable, educational place for my child to go and flourish. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for such an amazing opportunity for my son!"

Continued on next page

Fundraiser Results *Continued*

"Upon returning home from camp, Peter was a much happier person than when he left. He made new friends and wonderful memories. Camp gave him a sense fitting in and being comfortable in his own skin. He also gained a new sense of independence, confidence and the ability to succeed at tasks. Since camp has ended he has kept in contact with several of his bunkmates and has even gotten together with one that lives over two hours away. The two boys were so happy to see each other I truly believe that this will be a life-long friendship!"

"I want to say thank you for finding a way for my son to attend camp. This incomparable experience is something he will have for a lifetime. Going to camp has opened a brighter window for my son to look out of. He says he has never felt so accepted and understood in his life."

"I am writing to you with the most amazing thanks and appreciation that words cannot even express. Ian has consistently struggled with issues of executive function and severe sensory problems. There is nothing he has ever been particularly happy to attend in his life but WOW did that change this summer! He only spoke positively and excitedly about the friends he was making, the common interests and passions they shared, and the ability to feel good about his likes and dislikes. He became more flexible and began some serious prospective-taking! Were it not for POISE, we feel strongly that the outlook for a successful school year would be significantly reduced. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts."

Thanks again for making all of this possible. By teaching them life skills, independence and self-worth, camp has helped release the incredible potential of these amazing children. Please consider continuing to support this critical work as you plan any future charitable giving.

*Best wishes,
Jeffrey Weingarten, POISE President*

A VISIT TO MIDDLEBRIDGE AND AANE



In mid-October, we took a wonderful trip to see some of our favorite people. First, we drove to Narragansett, Rhode Island to visit the Middlebridge School.

Amazingly, this school community of approximately 45 students includes 7 current and former Akeela campers and 5 Akeela staff members! Because they were in class when we arrived, we only got to wave from afar, but it was great to see **Ally E, Julia G, Alex P, Eric W, Sarah H, Adam T** (Akeela '09) and **Matt J** (Akeela '11). We also spent some quality time with nurse **Naomi**, head counselors **Mike** and **Katie**, nanny **Allie** and Beyond Akeela advisor **James** – all of whom are doing incredible work at Middlebridge and making us very proud.

Speaking of being proud, we are overjoyed to announce Akeela's first wedding engagement. Two summers after meeting her at camp, **Mike** proposed to **Naomi** (in a canoe, on Miller Pond) just after Family Camp in late August. They are two of the most dedicated, talented, passionate, grounded and fun people we know and we wish them a lifetime of happiness together!

After a couple of days in Rhode Island, we made our way to Boston for the Asperger's Association of New England's fall conference. This year's speaker was the always-impressive Tony Attwood. Attwood is a clinical psychologist who specializes in autism spectrum disorders and has written many well-known books on the subject, including *The Complete Guide to Asperger's* and *Asperger's Syndrome – A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. In Boston, he presented on the unusual profile of cognitive abilities associated with Asperger's and shared strategies for helping to manage anxiety, sadness and anger. His content strongly reinforced our knowledge and philosophies. One of the points that we particularly identified with were his descriptions of the optimal personalities of teachers for our campers. He used phrases such as, "empathic", "flexible", "uses humor", "knowledge of peculiarities", etc.. We are proud that these are the types of phrases that we constantly use when describing our amazing group of counselors. There were nearly 1000 people in attendance, including many Akeela parents. For those of you who stopped by to say hello, it was great to see you! Anyone who isn't familiar with Tony Attwood and/or AANE, we encourage you to look them up.

FAMILY CAMP RECAP



As many of you know, we hosted our first ever Akeela Family Camp this past August. Just two days after the end of Second Session, camp was once again filled with the sounds of laughter as 13 families arrived for a week of Akeela magic. While almost everyone was new to the community, we were delighted to have **Spencer K** and **Rachel P** from Session 1, and **Amelia A** from Session 2 as "veteran" Akeela campers to help lead the way! Of course we were also lucky enough to have an incredible group of Akeela staff members stay for the week: **Grant** and **Kevin** in the kitchen; **Blayne** and **Kenny** on maintenance; **Naomi** in the health center; Head Counselors extraordinaire **Rob, Mike, Katie** and **Christine**;

Sarah at the art barn; **John** and **Kyle** in aquatics; **Cal, Mark, John-Robert, Greg** and **Allie** running activities and taking great care of campers. **Dave B** and **Katie O** also made a special guest appearance at the opening campfire. **Jaynie** even reprised her 2008 role as our archery specialist!

To be honest, we weren't exactly sure what to expect from Family Camp. We hadn't ever done it at Akeela and we knew that it would be really different from the regular camp sessions. Well, it was different ... and we're thrilled to report that it was also absolutely fantastic in every way. We were all positively blown away by how quickly and thoroughly everyone bonded and became a true camp community. The 24 children who were there (ranging in age from 4 to 14) forged friendships while enjoying all the camp activities, exploring the property, playing games and spending relaxing time with their families. Zip line, archery, creek exploration, LARPing and water sports were particularly popular. Meanwhile, the parents who came told us that they didn't remember the last time they felt so relaxed, comfortable and appreciated. They clearly enjoyed sharing with their children all that camp has to offer, while also relishing the time they had to deeply connect with other adults.

All in all, it was a great experience for us, for the staff and we think for everyone who attended as well. The 2013 dates are locked in (August 16 – 22) and applications are already starting to roll in. Please see www.campakeela.com/familycamp/ for more information and let us know if you're interested in joining us next summer!



CAMPER UPDATES!



All of the following campers are already reenrolled for summer 2013! The bunk numbers in parentheses are last summer's.

FIRST SESSION 2013

Matthew D (Bunk 1)
Aiden S (Bunk 1)
Jonah S (Bunk 1)
Zachary T (Bunk 1)
Nathan K (Bunk 2)
Chase S (Bunk 2)
Jeremy W (Bunk 2)
Daniel W (Bunk 2)
Zeke C (Bunk 3)
Richard G (Bunk 3)
Ben T (Bunk 3)
Mitchell C (Bunk 4)
Jack D (Bunk 4)
Jordan G (Bunk 4)
Harrison J (Bunk 4)
Jesse R (Bunk 4)
Jared S (Bunk 4)
Jonah K (Bunk 5)
Jake N (Bunk 5)
Connor S (Bunk 5)
Bradley M (Bunk 6)
Matthew S (Bunk 6)
Zach D (Bunk 7)
Noah K (Bunk 7)
Ethan S (Bunk 7)
Andrew K (Bunk 8)

David F (Bunk 11)
Charlie W (Bunk 11)
Spencer K (Bunk 12)
Sammy P (Bunk 12)
Jonah W (Bunk 12)
Sophie P (Bunk 13)
Emma B (Bunk 16)
Elizabeth T (Bunk 16)
Emma K-H (Bunk 17)
Sarah L (Bunk 17)
Ariana M (Bunk 17)
Allegra C (Bunk 18)
Gabby S (Bunk 18)
Hannah S (Bunk 18)
Chace Y (Bunk 18)
Noah K (Bunk 2,
Second Session)
Matthew S (Bunk 7,
Second Session)
Luke P (Bunk 11,
Second Session)

BEYOND AKEELA – FIRST SESSION

Kevin K (Bunk 8)
Rachael R (Bunk 16)

SECOND SESSION 2013

Spencer F (Bunk 1)
Daniel H (Bunk 2)
Ross P (Bunk 2)
Philip C (Bunk 3)
Elias G (Bunk 3)
Matthew J (Bunk 3)
Jake M (Bunk 3)
Luke B (Bunk 4)
Graham C (Bunk 4)
Jordan G (Bunk 4)
Drew B (Bunk 5)
Gavin C (Bunk 5)
Douglas G (Bunk 5)
Bret C (Bunk 6)
Abe G (Bunk 6)
Caleb K (Bunk 6)
Tyler K (Bunk 7)
Jared L (Bunk 7)
Peter O (Bunk 7)
David R (Bunk 7)
Daniel S (Bunk 7)
Eric W (Bunk 7)
Stuart L (Bunk 8)
Jacob G (Bunk 11)
Gavin M (Bunk 11)

Ezra S-F (Bunk 11)
Ethan B (Bunk 13)
John H (Bunk 13)
Gideon L (Bunk 13)
Madison W (Bunk 16)
Emily B (Bunk 17)
Anik B (Bunk 17)
Polly P (Bunk 17)
Lydia D (Bunk 18)
Claire H (Bunk 18)
Lydia K (Bunk 18)
Sabrina S (Bunk 18)
Cara W (Bunk 18)
Amelia A (Bunk 18)
Nicholas L (Bunk 3,
First Session)
Max B (Bunk 11,
First Session)
Joshua K (Bunk 12,
First Session)
Ben S (Family Camp)

BEYOND AKEELA – FIRST SESSION

Alexander S (Bunk 8)
Andrew S (Bunk 8)
Brendan C (Bunk 8)

ON OUR NIGHTSTAND & TIVO “NOW PLAYING” LIST

Homesick and Happy by Michael Thompson – We adore Michael Thompson (Raising Cain and Best Friends, Worst Enemies) and are thrilled that he's written a book about the importance of camp!

Create Your Own Economy: The Path to Prosperity in a Disordered World by Tyler Cowen – This one is on Jaynie's nightstand. She's not that far into it yet but heard good things from an Akeela staff member and looks forward to giving us her full review!

Telegraph Avenue by Michael Chabon – One of our favorite authors (The Amazing Adventures of Cavellier and Clay) and we really look forward to sinking our teeth into this one.

The Hobbit by JRR Tolkien – Debbie had never read it and wanted to be sure to have the literary experience before going to see the movies. It had been 20 years since Eric read it, so now he's reading it aloud to Debbie!

Parenthood – We see that this show was in this newsletter feature a year ago, but we're still watching it religiously! Highly recommended.

Friday Night Lights – In an effort not to watch “junk” just because it's on, we've asked friends to recommend past shows that we should go back and watch. So far, we're really enjoying this series about small-town Texas and life in high school.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart – We try not to make it our only source of news, but it's certainly the most entertaining.



Birthdays



CAMPER BIRTHDAYS

Emma K-H (1st & 2nd, Bunk 17), November 1
Andres G (1st, Bunk 1), November 2
Kyle S (2nd, Bunk 1), November 4
Claire H (2nd, Bunk 18), November 7
Matt D (2nd, Bunk 6), November 8
Joshua A (1st, Bunk 6), November 9
Ariana M (1st, Bunk 17), November 12
Nicholas E (1st, Bunk 5), November 13
Claire F (2nd, Bunk 16), November 14
David O (2nd, Bunk 11), November 15
Ross P (2nd, Bunk 2), November 19
Drew S (1st, Bunk 3), November 20
Andrew S (2nd, Bunk 8), November 21
Jared S (2nd, Bunk 2), November 23
Bret C (2nd, Bunk 6), November 25
Daniel H (2nd, Bunk 2), November 30
Carey D (2nd, Bunk 4), December 1
Alexandra P (2nd, Bunk 16), December 6
Connor S (1st, Bunk 5), December 6
Ethan G (1st, Bunk 11), December 6
Beth A (2nd, Bunk 16), December 7
Megan A (2nd, Bunk 16), December 7
Emma B (1st, Bunk 16), December 12

Cara W (2nd, Bunk 18), December 16
Calen H (BA 1st, Bunk 15), December 21
Caroline T (1st, Bunk 17), December 22
Nishan B (2nd, Bunk 1), December 22
Walter M (1st, Bunk 8), December 26
Spencer F (2nd, Bunk 1), December 27
Ethan B (2nd, Bunk 13), December 30
John R (1st, Bunk 1), January 1
Sheila D (1st, Bunk 16), January 3
Charlie W (1st, Bunk 11), January 6
Kevin K (1st, Bunk 8), January 9
Andrew K (1st, Bunk 8), January 10
Harrison J (1st, Bunk 4), January 10
Alexis U (1st, Bunk 18), January 12
Gavin C (2nd, Bunk 5), January 15
Drew B (2nd, Bunk 5), January 16
Sarah H (2nd, Bunk 16), January 16
Peter O (2nd, Bunk 7), January 17
Gabby S (1st, Bunk 18), January 22
Hannah S (1st, Bunk 18), January 22
Jeremy W (1st, Bunk 2), January 26
David N (1st, Bunk 5), January 27
Rachel P (1st, Bunk 17), January 31

STAFF BIRTHDAYS



Anna G, October 6
Laura G, October 6
Stefan L, October 6
Kaitlyn R, October 15
Maricela V, October 15
Chef Kevin, October 18
Amanda B, October 20
Sarah B, November 17
Rachel I, November 28
Dave B, December 1

Alex R, December 3
Camron C, December 8
Caleb H, December 9
Justine E, December 17
Jonny B, December 21
David C, December 23
Yesenia T, December 24
Nick W, December 27
James D, December 28
Alan R, January 5

Gabriela M, January 11
Callan G, January 12
Rob G, January 12
Demi S, January 17
Mark Y, January 17
Sarah W, January 20
Katie F, January 23
Hannah M, January 29