



Camp AkeelaSM Circular

News from the Directors

Dear Friends,

As we sit here, writing this newsletter, we can't help but think back to where we were as a camp at this time last year. Camp Akeela in Wisconsin was very much an unfulfilled dream – we weren't sure exactly how things would look once that dream became a reality! We were hopeful that our new Midwestern camp site would carry all of the same warmth, love, and magic that our Vermont camp had, but the truth is that it was all still somewhat theoretical. After all, by mid-February of last year, we only had nine campers enrolled and a few counselors hired!



Fast-forward to today... 70 campers have already enrolled for this summer, we are adding fun and exciting optional trips to our already diverse program, and we are fresh off of our first-ever camper reunion! As you'll see in some of the photos in this newsletter, our reunion was full of campers playing, laughing, and reconnecting with one another. While watching these interactions take place, it was hard not to become emotional as we realized that the warmth, love, and magic we so desperately wanted to help create in our new community was happening right in front of our eyes. As we prepare for our second summer in Appleton, we are so thrilled to see what's in store for our growing community.

While we head into summer #2 in the Midwest, our Vermont camp is preparing for its 10th anniversary reunion celebration this summer. It's important to recognize that without everything that Akeela has done since 2008 in Vermont, our community in Wisconsin would not be possible. Some of those most noteworthy accomplishments are:

- Going from a community of 40 campers per session in 2008 to having 120 campers per session by 2017
- Providing a life-changing summer camp experience to over 1000 campers
- Aiding in the professional development of over 350 staff members
- On a more fun note - there have been NINE staff couples who have all met at Akeela, fallen in love and gotten married (including us!)

We are so excited for the future and to see where camp in Wisconsin is ten years from now. Until then, the next chapter in our story begins in just 4 months!

See you soon,

Dave *Katie*

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IMPORTANT 2018 DATES

WI FIRST SESSION:
June 19 - July 1

WI SECOND SESSION:
July 3 - July 15



It's not too soon to start planning for camp!

We know it's still winter; for most of our friends in the northern Midwest or on the East Coast, it's cold and snowy and summer seems very far away. But the next few months will pass quickly and before we know it, we'll be together at camp! As we gear up for the summer here in the office, we thought that it might be helpful for you to start preparing at home, too. Here are some suggestions of things you might do between now and summer to get ready for an amazing experience at Akeela:



**MONTHS
BEFORE CAMP**

- If you are a returning camper, email or call an Akeela friend. Get in touch and see how he/she's doing. Talk about what you're looking forward to at camp. Maybe set up a time to get together, in person, or online.
- If you are a new camper, explore the Akeela website to see a daily schedule, photos of camp and more details about the community that you'll be joining. Make a list of any questions you'd like to ask us or your pen-pal (whose contact information you'll get in the late spring).
- Talk to other people you know who have been to camp and find out what they loved about their experience.

- Make a list of all of the things you're excited to try at Akeela this summer.
- Plan a sleepover outside of your home to get used to sleeping in a different bed.
- Order any Camp Akeela "gear" you want for camp.



**MONTHS
BEFORE CAMP**



**MONTHS
BEFORE CAMP**

- Start gathering a list of family and friends you might want to write to while you're at camp.
- Address envelopes to those people with your parents and put stamps on now ... It's one less thing to do when you're busy at camp!
- Practice doing more things on your own like making your bed, picking out your clothes, etc.
- Make sure your parents sent all of your camp forms in!

- Get in touch with your pen-pal. Ask him/her questions about him/herself. Talk about shared interests and the things you're excited about trying at camp!
- Make sure you and your parents have everything you'll need to pack – look at the list and check things off.
- Practice the camp daily schedule (wake-up, meal times, showering every day, bedtime routines).
- Start limiting your "screen time" (TV, video games, etc.) so that you're feeling ready to jump right into your fun- filled, electronics-free camp life!

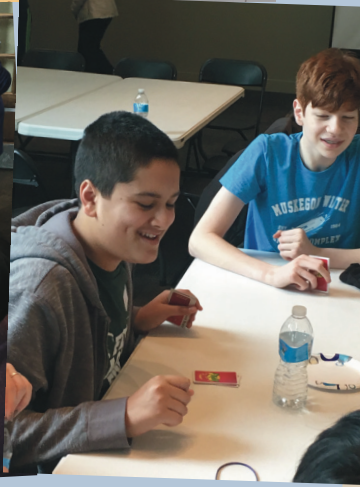
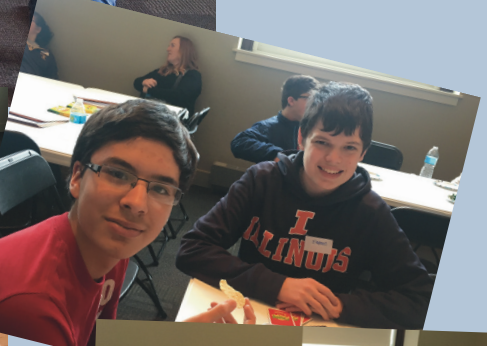
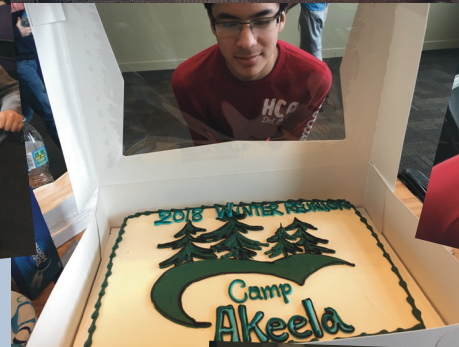


**MONTH
BEFORE CAMP!**

WE'LL SEE YOU SOON!

FIRST EVER CHICAGO-AREA REUNION!

Even though the snowy weather tried to spoil the plans, the first-ever Chicago area reunion on Saturday, February 10, was an incredible success! More than a dozen campers and their families, along with Dave and head counselor extraordinaire Lauren O., got together for a slideshow of memories from the summer, games of Uno and Apples-to-Apples, and lots of reconnecting with old camp friends. Because campers from both 1st and 2nd session were in attendance, there were even some new friendships made, as well! Check out some of the photos from our wonderful event...



What To Expect From Our Camper Feedback Reports

We value partnering with parents to maximize each of our camper's experience at camp so that they can continue to grow and learn even after the summer ends. This partnership values the expertise of our staff and the parents' unique insights as they work together to establish shared expectations for the camper's social and emotional growth. Our Camper Reports, written by our head counselors, serve to provide a written document for parents to review and share with other individuals who support our campers throughout the year. These reports will be emailed to each family shortly after our campers return home. In order to make these reports more meaningful for each individual family, we lean on our partnership with parents before campers arrive so that we can gain insight into parents' goals and expectations.

As you prepare for your camper's arrival at camp, we hope the following information will be helpful to you and look forward to receiving your feedback as we think about welcoming our campers.

Before your camper leaves home, talk to your camper about:

- Strengths and areas for improvement
- Goals for the summer
- Any concerns your camper would like you to share with our team

Your camper's head counselor will call you the week before camp, talk to them about:

- Your goals for your camper
- Any concerns you and your camper have
- Any dietary or medical concerns (you will also speak to the nurse about this)
- Tools/Skills that have helped your camper at home when he/she is struggling

What will your camper's report look like?

The goal of our report is not to surprise you with NEW information! Your twice-weekly calls or email updates from your camper's head counselor will enable us to keep you informed during camp about how your child is doing. The reports are a review of this information in a format that you will be able to share with your camper (if you feel it will be helpful) and any professionals who work with your camper.

Please keep in mind that we aim to do the majority of our communicating with parents during the summer in an effort to partner with you. Our reports are not a report card. We will do our best to help you understand how your child fit into our camp community. When appropriate, we will provide you with any insight and suggestions for how to help your camper continue to move forward with the success he/she had at camp.

After you receive the report:

- If appropriate, feel free to share the report with your camper and use it as a springboard to discuss areas that you'd like him/her to continue to work on and celebrate his/her successes.
- Share the report with individuals who work with your camper, such as teachers, therapists, social skills leaders, etc.
- Call us at the camp office to discuss any questions or concerns

Meet some of your 2018 Senior Staff!

While our cabin counselors and activity specialists are the fantastic staff members hired to work most directly with campers and cabin groups, our Senior Staff members play a critical role in supporting those counselors and helping the directors run camp.

Our **head counselors** are adults who live in our community and who supervise 3-4 bunk groups. They oversee the well-being of the campers and staff in those groups and are the primary "point person" for parents to call when they have a question about their child's success at camp. Our head counselors spend all day out in camp with their campers and staff, providing ongoing support and feedback. They check messages a few times a day and return parent calls - usually in the evening. They are a wonderful resource to us, serving as our eyes and ears, because we cannot be everywhere at once!

Our **program director** is the person who does much of the behind the scenes work to make sure that all of the activities are scheduled and implemented smoothly throughout each session. This person supervises our activity specialists and program heads, schedules specialty selections, is instrumental in planning and running our creative trips and special events, and does everything they can to make sure that campers are having a blast at all of our camp activities!

Like all of our program areas, we strive to make our art program truly top-notch. Our **art director** supervises all aspects of our art program, including both general art and our new ceramics activity. The art director orients the staff on the goals of the art program at camp and prepares their staff to lead campers through a variety of different art projects.

And now we would like to introduce you to the names behind those titles who will be integral parts of your child's success at camp this summer!



Lauren O'Brien

Head Counselor

Lauren lives in Madison, WI where she teaches 7th grade math and social studies. She joined the Akeela staff in the summer of 2016 in Vermont as a cabin counselor and made the jump to head counselor in her homeland of Wisconsin in 2017. Lauren has a Bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Elementary Education and English as a Second Language.

Since joining the Akeela family, Lauren has fallen in love with camp life and couldn't be more excited for another summer filled with awesome camp traditions (evening meeting and campfire being her personal favorites) and a wonderful crew of campers and counselors.

Favorite Book: Small Great Things by Jodi Picoult

Place I'd like to Visit: Ireland

Favorite Camp Food: Tacos



Joe Torok

Head Counselor

Joe currently lives in Detroit, Michigan. After two years as the director of Beyond Akeela and one year as a head counselor in Vermont, Joe will be joining the Wisconsin crew as a head counselor this summer.

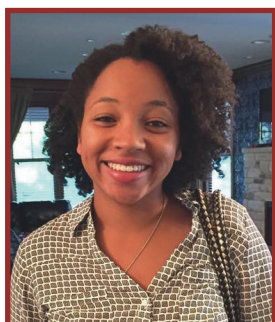
He teaches writing at Wayne State University, and he has also taught a number of writing, reading, and student development classes at Eastern Michigan University and Lansing Community College. Joe has written for a newspaper as a restaurant critic and reporter, done a little college sports reporting, and worked for a time with the most wonderful kids in the world (besides Akeela campers!) at a special education school in Lansing, Michigan.

Favorite Book: A Confederacy of Dunces by John Kennedy Toole

Place I'd like to Visit: Budapest

Favorite Camp Food: Fajitas

Meet some of your 2018 Senior Staff... *continued from previous page*



Catricia Morris

Program Director

Catricia currently lives in Boston, MA, where she is working towards a Master's degree in Prevention Science and Practice and a license in School Adjustment Counseling from Harvard. Before returning to school, she worked as a Behavioral Therapist for children and adolescents on the Autism Spectrum in her native Minnesota.

Catricia joined the Akeela staff in 2015 as a cabin counselor. She moved to the program side of camp in 2017 as the Lead Program Specialist at Akeela Wisconsin and will be our Program Director this summer. In her free time, Catricia loves to dance, listen to music, and spend time with her family and friends. She is originally from Minnesota and has loved being part of Akeela's move to the Midwest. She loves all things camp life!

Favorite Book: My Sister's Keeper by Jodi Picoult

Place I'd like to Visit: India

Favorite Camp Food: Grilled Cheese and Tomato Soup



Preston Gilchrist

Art Director

Preston lives in Alexandria, Louisiana, which is the geographic center of the state and referred to locally as "Cenla". Preston received his BA in Fine Arts at the University of New Orleans, and finished his Master of Fine Arts at Louisiana Tech. He has over 25 years experience as an arts educator, including four summers as the Art Director at Camp Akeela, four years as an Art Therapist at Central Louisiana State Hospital, and 20 years experience directing day camps and educational programming for arts organizations in Central Louisiana. Currently he serves as Lead Teacher for the Talented Art Program in the Rapides Parish School System.

Preston revels in the creative energy and unlimited potential for success that accompanies working with children in an artistic environment. He looks forward to sharing his enthusiasm for art in Wisconsin this summer!

Preston and his wife Karen have spent a good portion of the last five years building a house and studio space in their free time and plan to finish before Akeela Wisconsin this year.

Favorite Book: Anansi Boys by Neil Gaiman

Place I'd like to Visit: Bruges, Belgium

Favorite Camp Food: Pizza, of course!



RETURNING CAMPERS

We love having a great mix of returning and new campers at Akeela. First-time campers bring so much to our community: new friendships, fresh ideas, and a contagious enthusiasm for all things Akeela. They also benefit from the guidance and wisdom of Akeela "veterans". These returning campers are the keepers of camp traditions and understand in their souls how magical Akeela is. Here is a list of returning campers already re-enrolled for this summer and which sessions they will be attending...

JJ B (Sessions 1&2)

Francisco B (Sessions 1&2)

Ben H (Session 1)

Jacob B (Sessions 1&2)

Robert W (Session 1)

Alan D (Session 1)

Devin P (Sessions 1&2)

Luke P (Sessions 1&2)

Ben S (Sessions 1&2)

Nathan O (Session 1)

Alec T (Session 1)

Ben U (Session 1)

Samuel B (Session 1)

Eamon K (Session 1)

Jordan K (Session 1)

Zachary A (Sessions 1&2)

William H (Sessions 1&2)

Cole M (Sessions 1&2)

Aditi S (Session 1)

Eva T (Session 1)

Clara J (Session 1)

Tessa J (Session 1)

Arly D (Session 1)

Lucy M (Sessions 1&2)

Rainie P (Sessions 1&2)

Anna P (Session 1)

Ethan S (Session 2)

Jack O (Session 2)

CAMP BIRTHDAYS

CAMPER BIRTHDAYS

Jacob M.....February 18

Aditi S.....February 19

Elena Q.....February 21

Charlie H.....February 21

Zachary A.....February 23

Devin P.....March 8

Rainie P.....March 11

Ben S.....March 18

Gabriel C.....March 20

Eamon K.....March 23

Alan D.....March 27

Arly D.....March 27

Daniel T.....April 10

Justin T.....April 10

Jack K.....April 11

Jordan F.....April 11

Casper L.....April 23



STAFF BIRTHDAYS

Nurse Annie...February 26

Jacob N.....March 2

Tiger T..... March 3

Wyatt S.....March 30

Ellie N.....April 4

Ivanna H.....April 30

New this summer!

In addition to all of the fun and exciting program offerings that we had last year, we are excited to announce that we will be adding **CERAMICS** to the schedule this year! A local ceramics studio has generously agreed to donate two pottery wheels for our use. Preston will also be using their space to fire all of our ceramics specialty projects!

In addition to our outdoor adventure hikes and overnight camping trips, other new trip options for 2018 include:

- Guided kayaking adventure down the Fox River
 - Biking trip on a local bike path
- Visiting and touring a local animal shelter (and, of course, playing with the animals!)
- A NEW zipline and high ropes course adventure trip

AKEELA ALUMNUS: NOLAN DOST

Without a doubt, my favorite memories from camp are cool summer nights, singing songs around the campfire as a whole community. I wish I could share that sort of bonding experience with my new friends here at college. Those sort of memories can only really be found at summer camps, so I'm really thankful to have them to look back on.

Since leaving Akeela, life has been a series of ups and downs. Akeela gave me a head-start on dealing with my Asperger's, while continued support from my family and schools has helped me deal with my differences in a healthy, constructive manner. Many people today don't even know that I have Asperger's unless I tell them.

In my final year of high school, I got my first time job as a busser at a fine dining restaurant. It was there that I learned about how to apply social skills towards the service industry that I still work in today almost 4 years later. Also in my final year of high school is when I was accepted into the college I am still attending, DigiPen Institute of Technology in Redmond, Washington.

I moved up to Washington state from California almost 3 years ago. Going away to Akeela was great practice for leaving my parents and home, which made the transition to college seem like a cake walk. I currently live in my own apartment with 3 roommates and two cats named Sophie and Juno.

At DigiPen, I am pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Game Design. My goal is to turn an intimate and detailed knowledge of a player's desires from a game or system into a quantifiable and actionable set of data and improvements to existing products. I often think that my Asperger's gives me a unique level of separation and perspective on what players want and need. Thinking about how people feel in a moment or how they might perceive certain actions comes quite naturally to me, thanks to the social skills I learned at Akeela and during high school. Self-awareness and social awareness were once weaknesses and are now strengths!

Outside of DigiPen, I've started working as a bartender at a local restaurant. This job requires more social skills such as guiding and influencing others. I'm still not perfect at these things, as learning new ways of interacting with specific goals in mind can be quite tricky for me, but I feel like since Akeela, my outlook on life is much more outgoing and adventurous. I like to try new things and I tend to have pretty experimental methods for tasks at work, school, or in life. Breaking boundaries for myself comes naturally now!

I plan to continue working with my high school and with other communities that supported me during my development as a youth. The young really are the future and I cannot begin to explain how influential great camp counselors can be. A strong, encouraging role model can shape a kid's perspective in life in major ways. In many respects, teaching a player about a video game that I've made is similar to teaching a child how to use a bow and arrow or swim across a lake. It takes patience, understanding, and compassion -- all attributes that I remember feeling from Akeela camp counselors.

In the future, I plan to focus on entering the video game industry. For many millennials, being a game developer or designer can be similar to how baby boomers wanted to be astronauts. It's a pipe dream that many abandon early. DigiPen is really the place where those dreams become reality and I'm happy to be receiving the highest quality video game design education in the United States. I have well over a dozen different connections to workers in the industry and in March, I am attending the Alt-Ctrl-GDC industry event with a project team that I do design work for. The future is bright and even if things slip up, I know I have my incredible, loving parents behind me. I have the skills to maneuver the professional worlds that I am already entering and I have fond memories to look back on.

Realizing that flaws are part of what makes the human experience so challenging has been a long process. It's hard to say that each person knows what they're doing 100% of the time and when I was a kid, it was really frustrating seeing other kids instantly becoming friends with each other like it was natural. It took a lot of practice to realize that those skills which were hard for me can be learned and honed over years. Homeschooling was isolating for me, but Akeela was enlightening. Akeela taught me to put myself out there and to this day, I feel the impact that my time at camp has had.



Nolan was an Akeela camper at our Vermont site in 2010 and 2011, when he was 13 and 14 years old. Originally from Northern California, Nolan now attends DigiPen Institute of Technology in Redmond, Washington. He is hoping to make the cross-country trek to attend Akeela's 10th anniversary reunion in June.