



AKEELA NEWS

APRIL 2023

IMPORTANT DATES

FORMS DEADLINE: MAY 15

OPEN HOUSE: JUNE 11

FIRST SESSION: JUNE 24 - JULY 17

SECOND SESSION: JULY 20 - AUGUST 12

FAMILY CAMP: AUGUST 15 - AUGUST 20

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A Letter from the Directors: Spring Preparation

Spring is here in full force! April came and went in the blink of an eye and now we're getting prepped to move up to Vermont for the summer! Here, in the Sasson house, we're doing the same things you are (hopefully!) as we prepare our daughters for their summer away at sleepaway camp. We're busy completing forms, taking other forms to the pediatrician's office for signatures, getting prescription info to PackMyRx, and going through the bins of camp clothing/gear to see what we need to get new for this summer. Phew - it's a lot of work! We appreciate how much effort is needed to get your camper ready for camp and we want to say - IT'S WORTH IT! Getting some of the logistics sorted out now means that you can focus on the more important things, like helping your camper prepare emotionally (see Debbie's note on that topic further down)!

Speaking of getting ready, families (and campers) often ask us what it takes to get camp ready each year and what we do to help welcome and prepare our staff for the arrival of our campers. Here's what the spring looks like for us....and our team!

- Eric and Erin head up to camp at the end of May in order to welcome our "Pre-Camp" crew of staff who help us get our physical space ready! This team will be painting, building and moving lots of equipment and setting up our program areas. We're so grateful for this crew!
- Debbie will follow about a week later (answering calls in our Philly office and spending a few more days with our kids) to help prepare for Open House and finalize plans for Staff Orientation. Around the same time, our aquatics team will arrive for their training and certification course. Our Head Counselors and Program Heads will also start to arrive (although a few are teachers and so will have to come a bit later this year)!
- Finally - our entire staff will join us at camp on June 14th! We'll then spend 10 days building our staff family, instilling in them our values of community and preparing emotionally and physically for the summer ahead. If you're curious about the topics we cover in our staff training, some of them include: Building Relationships with Akeela Campers, Child Development, Social Skills in a Camp Setting, Program Philosophy, Waterfront Safety, Emergency Preparedness, Wellness (physical and emotional)....and much, much more.

This is a busy and exciting time of year and we can't wait to see your children in-person very soon. As always, please call or email us with any questions or concerns!

Update on gender-inclusive housing



We want to thank everyone for their insights on gender-inclusive housing. Our community is overwhelmingly supportive of the idea, and it makes us proud that our campers are surrounded by folks who are accepting, loving, and celebratory of them! Although we did not have enough interest this year to open a gender-inclusive bunk, we will continue to gather interest in all future summers, and open age-appropriate bunks if there are enough campers opting-in. Although this year there is no official gender-inclusive bunk, Akeela has always been a safe space for campers of all genders, and we affirm campers' identities and refer to everyone by the name and pronouns they request.

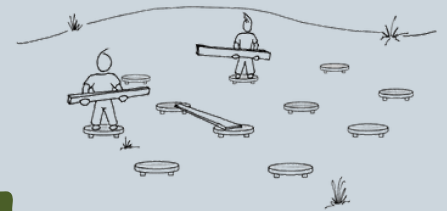
What's New For 2023?

One of the most amazing things about camp is that it provides a steadying influence in a quickly-changing world. The sense of community, the traditions, and the core culture of camp remain pretty much the same year to year -- and often generation to generation. At the same time, we've learned that every summer at camp is a little bit different from the last.

We each grow as individuals during the school year, our friendships evolve, and we bring a new perspective into each summer. That's all part of what makes coming **back** to camp so wonderful. As camp directors, we're also always learning and working to make camp better and better. To that end, we're **thrilled to announce some new exciting activities and facilities for Akeela '23:**



At the low ropes course, campers will find some great new elements: the **up-and- over wall (left)** and a versatile new challenge called **The Meuse (right)**.



At high ropes, we're also planning to add **crate-stacking**. You're harnessed-in so it's super safe, and the goal is to stack as many crates as possible, while you're also ON them!

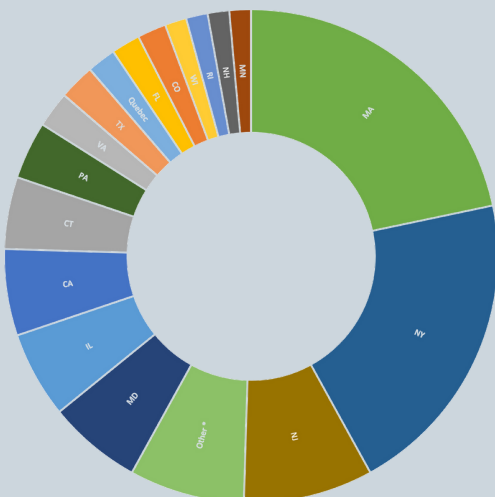


At the lake, we have replaced the slide with an even cooler inflatable. It's called **The Power Tower** and includes a huge slide and an aqua climbing wall!



And as we announced in the last newsletter, we're also adding **PICKLEBALL!**

We are gearing up for an amazing summer!



Akeela Campers: Where Do They Come From?

You might have to zoom in on the image, but as you can see from the graphic, we come from all over!

The *Other category includes:

* AL, DC, GA, KY, LA, ME, MI, OH, OK, UT, VT, & Peru

Our staff this year are coming from all over the U.S., plus Ireland, England, Scotland, Mexico, Cyprus, Germany, Poland, and South Africa!

Preparing your camper - and yourself - for summer: some advice from Debbie

Both of our daughters (ages 14 and 9) will be away at their camp this summer for 7 weeks. I'm a camp director and we're very friendly with the camp directors who run their camp. I "shouldn't" be nervous, right? But I am! I am a worrier and I worry most about my family - so when I allow myself to get caught up in thinking about the "what-ifs", it can get pretty messy and then my anxiety is obvious to my kids.

I know that my most important task right now is to help instill a *sense of confidence* in my children before they are at camp on their own. In order to do that I also need to prepare myself, and that takes time and energy - **a positive energy**. Pushing through our own fears and worries needs to be a priority so we can meet our children with a "clean slate". They need to feel our optimism and confidence that going to camp will be a life-changing experience - one that will enable them to become more independent and confident, and will hopefully open them up to meaningful friendships that will last a long time. Our children are intuitive and if they sense that we're afraid about this very big transition, they will take on that worry themselves.

Some things that I've found helpful, and some advice for those of you who are anxious about camp this summer:

- Write it down! Take some time during the day (not right before bed or you'll never be able to fall asleep!) to jot down anything that's making you feel anxious. Writing your worries down will allow you to acknowledge them and either use your notes to address the concern, or let it go.
- This includes making lists - what do you need to do?
 - Have you completed your forms?
 - Sent in the RX from the pediatrician?
 - Looked at the packing list to assess what you might need? And have you gone through last year's "camp stuff" to see what still fits?
- Call us! If you're concerned about something, maybe we can help. Sometimes, more information is helpful in minimizing our fears.
- Breathe! Go for a walk or take 10 minutes with a cup of tea to relax. How often do you allow yourself to take time for just yourself? It's important and it's helpful.
- Read "Homesick and Happy". This is a great book, especially for first-time camp parents. It's filled with helpful information, plus - reading will help you take your mind off of your own worries.

By the way, this is great advice for your anxious camper too! Once you are feeling confident about having your camper with us at camp, take some time to sit down with them to make a list of their "things to do" before camp. Maybe there's one task you can do together each week to prepare, for example: address envelopes for letters to family/friends, email Debbie/Eric/Erin a few questions, make a list of books/card games/crafts you want to bring to camp....etc.

You may also want to help your camper make a list or start a journal with things they're looking forward to doing at camp. Do they have a goal in mind? Something new they want to try or something they want to accomplish?

Now is the time to start pushing your camper to be more independent in anticipation of being on their own this summer:

- Are younger campers getting ready for bed and school independently? (Showering, brushing their teeth, putting away their clothes....etc.)
- Are older campers thinking about non-electronic activities they can do during down times this summer? Having your camper think about these things NOW will help them feel more prepared as summer approaches.

Finally, as I've written about this year on a few different occasions, it's important to use language that acknowledges a child's worries but also expresses confidence. Statements like, **"I know you're worried about going to camp AND I'm really certain that you can do this."** These types of statements are the loving push our campers need to feel more secure in this transition.

We're very excited to see your child at camp in a very short time - sooner if you'll be joining us for our Open House on June 11! Your camper's Head Counselor will be emailing you in mid-June to introduce themselves to you and they'll want to know if there's anything on your mind. Feel free to start a list now that you can email or call once our team is all up in Vermont. Enjoy your Spring and we'll see you soon!



What is a Head Counselor, and who are the 2023 HCs?

Your camper's head counselor will be the person you are most in-contact with this summer! They are adults who, in their professional lives outside of camp, are often educators and school counselors, and have a large amount of experience working with children. During camp, they oversee an age-specific "campus" at Camp Akeela (3 to 4 bunks), ensure the well-being of the campers and staff in their campus, and are the "point person" for communication with home. They'll be giving you updates on your camper, and although the main focus of their role is being out on-camp supporting the campers, they check emails and messages a few times a day and return all communication as soon as possible. Check out 2023's head counselors below!

Justin Rivera



Justin (he/they) is from New Jersey, where he is an instructional support aide in an elementary school setting. He has worked in education and childcare for ten years, and has spent summers at camps for nine years. Justin specializes in social skills coaching, community living, and life skills for teenagers entering adulthood; and assists in classroom integration for various learning styles. He will be returning to Camp Akeela for his third summer as a Head Counselor. When Justin is not busy working with students, he works a professional arts career as a dance theater artist, yoga instructor, and writer. He loves to go on trail walks and long hikes in New Jersey, reading on a comfy chair, and a casual game of chess.

Favorite Book: *Upstream* by Mary Oliver **Place I'd Like to Visit:** Barcelona **Favorite Camp Food:** Cookout Burgers

Courtney Smith



Courtney (she/her) is from the state of North Carolina. After attending NC State and earning her degree in Communication Media, she decided to make Raleigh home. She is currently a K-5 Special Education teacher and has her Masters in Special Education from NC State, with a focus on students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. When Courtney first came to Akeela in 2019, she fell in love with the campers and the lifelong friends she made that summer. This will be Courtney's fifth summer at camp and when she's not at Akeela, you can find her loudly and proudly cheering on the NC State Wolfpack in various sports, volunteering with Miracle League of the Triangle or playing in an adult sports league. Courtney also enjoys catching up with staff friends around the world throughout the year.

Favorite Book: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* **Place I'd Like to Visit:** Portugal **Favorite Camp Food:** Brookies

Jake Ferguson



Jake (he/him) first worked at Camp Akeela in 2017, and has spent every summer with us since! Over the years, he has been a Hiking Specialist, Sailing Instructor, Counselor at Large, and Head Counselor. Raised in Washington State, Jake moved to New York to attend Vassar College. At the end of his first year of college, he learned that he needed a summer internship. While hastily googling "good summer jobs for college students," he discovered Akeela and immediately fell in love with its tight-knit community and passionate counselors. Since 2020, he has worked as a special educator and behavioral interventionist in schools around Northwestern Vermont. On his time off, Jake loves playing soccer, backpacking, and swimming in Lake Champlain.

Favorite Book: *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino **Place I'd Like to Visit:** Gates of the Arctic National Park **Favorite Camp Food:** Grilled Cheese

Nicole Frederick



Nicole's (she/her) first summer at Akeela was in 2014 and has continued to be in touch with the camp community in various capacities over the years. When she's not at camp, Nicole is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, and has worked in psychiatric hospitals, schools, and in the community as a music therapist and mental health counselor. She particularly enjoys working with adolescents and this will be her second summer as a head counselor. Outside of work, Nicole enjoys playing the violin in community orchestra, doing yoga, being outside, and playing with her dog, Juniper, who is from the farm around the corner from camp!

Favorite Book: *Walk Two Moons*, Sharon Creech **Place I'd Like to Visit:** Costa Rica **Favorite Camp Food:** Good Old Grilled Cheese

Reminders

MEDICATION

Please sign up as soon as possible for [PackMyRx](#). As a reminder, PackMyRx is required for ALL daily medication, prescription or otherwise.



PHYSICAL EXAMS AND OTHER CAMP FORMS

Please remember to submit all of your camp forms. Those can be found after you've logged in using the [Staff & Family Login](#) link in the top right corner of our website. **Forms are due May 15.** Please note that the Physician's Exam Form must be completed by your camper's doctor.



AKEELA GEAR

CampSpot is our official camp supplier. To see our page on [CampSpot](#), simply type Akeela where it asks for Camp Name on their home page. There is lots of great Akeela gear in our camp store, but **only the basic logo'd lightweight cotton t-shirt is required.**

BAGGAGE SHIPPING

Unpacking our campers is a vital part of how we welcome them to Akeela. Except for our overseas campers, we require that all trunks/duffels arrive at camp at least 3 days prior to the start of your child's session. A few options for getting your camper's bags to camp:

- Drop them off at camp during Open House in June, if you're attending
- Arrange shipment through UPS, FedEx or USPS
- Sign up for [R & B Camp Baggage](#) - recommended for families in a Northeast metropolitan area
- Sign up for [ShipCamps](#) - recommended for families elsewhere in the U.S.



OPEN HOUSE

We look forward to seeing many of our first-time camper families at camp on Sunday, June 11. If you haven't already sent your RSVP, which is available in your forms dashboard, please do so.



Welcome to our RN team, Pam & Chuck

We are thrilled to be welcoming two new nurses to Akeela this summer! Both are very excited to be spending the summer with us at camp and can't wait to meet our amazing campers.

Hi all, I'm Pam (she/her). I have been a Registered Nurse for over 36 years, mostly working in pediatric care. I'm originally from Texas, and am really excited to make the journey to Vermont! I'm bringing along my husband of 38 years, Greg, and our little dog. I have two children and five grandchildren, who take up most of my spare time, and I know how hard it is to entrust your little ones into someone else's care - we appreciate it and are ready to look after them like they're our own!



Hi, I'm Chuck (he/him)! I've been an RN for over 17 years in Northern Idaho, and I am ready to meet all the campers and help them with their medical needs! I have specialized in surgery with an emphasis in helping children get ready and recover from their operations. I also worked as a nurse for many group homes that cared for children, where I loved spending time with the kids. In my free time I love golfing, being outside, swimming, and making new friends! I can't wait to meet everyone at camp this summer.

