

FALL 2025

AKEELA NEWSLETTER

Friendship, Community, Growth, Pride and Fun!



ENROLL NOW FOR 2026

Session 1:
Friday, June 26 - Friday, July 17

Session 2:
Monday, July 20 - Monday, August 10

Family Camp:
Thursday, August 13 - Tuesday, August 18

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTORS

After a warm start to the fall, we're finally feeling like "sweater weather" is upon us here in Philly. Our kids are settled into the new school year (grades 6 and 11) and we've been very busy enrolling many new and returning campers for next summer. In fact, there are more campers enrolled than we've ever had this time of year! It's clear to us that our campers had a wonderful summer, highlighted by amazing friendships. We have many bunk groups from which all or almost all of the campers have re-enrolled. That's what camp is about. You likely know that we keep our cabin groups together year-after-year so that friendships can grow closer as our campers grow up together. It is truly one of our favorite things about being camp directors; getting to watch these relationships develop is such a gift.

Erin has been very busy chatting with our 2025 counselors and staff, and we're thrilled to report that many of them are planning to return next summer. Having returning staff at camp to lead by example and to pass along the "Akeela way" to our new staff members is so valuable. Many of our leaders and senior staff will also be back in '26. We'll get a list out to you of our returning staff in our next newsletter.

Debbie is busy talking to parents of prospective new campers. She loves getting to know families and helping them assess whether or not their child is ready for Akeela. You may have heard her say it before: she thinks of her job as partly being a "matchmaker" for our campers. She always tries to imagine how a new camper will fit in with our Akeela community and to the specific bunk. It's so rewarding to see it all come together in front of us in June and July!

In addition to meeting families with Debbie and interviewing staff with Erin, Eric has been working on keeping our physical property in tip-top shape! He and Keefe (our year-round site manager) are planning a full upgrade to the camper kitchen - very exciting news for our culinary arts program! They're also finalizing plans to rebuild our Pavilion (where we host all of our plays, talent shows, movie nights, rainy-day activities, and much more). It's a big project that will likely not be complete until next winter, but that's something to look forward to in the summer of 2027.

We hope everyone in our Akeela family is finding time to enjoy being outside before it gets too cold. We always try to hold on to as much of the outdoors as possible - Eric loves playing pickleball, Erin loves to take Koda and Archie for long walks, and Debbie can often be found reading a book on their porch.

Happy Thanksgiving! As always, we're thankful for you!

SONGS OF THE SUMMER



At camp, we love including music! We've curated two playlists; one of our classic campfire songs that we sing every week, and one full of camper favorites, that we were jamming, dancing, and singing-along to all summer! Grown-ups, rest assured we listen to clean versions only! Click on the Playlist titles for our Spotify links, or download manually if you're on another platform!

2025 HITS



HOT TO GO - CHAPPEL ROAN



GOLDEN - KPOP DEMON HUNTERS



ABRACADABRA - LADY GAGA



PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE - SABRINA CARPENTER



EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED - TAYLOR SWIFT



FIRST - EVERGLOW



LOVESICK GIRLS - BLACKPINK



HOUSE OF MEMORIES - PANIC! AT THE DISCO



GABRIELA - KATSEYE



MYSTICAL MAGICAL - BENSON BOONE

CAMPFIRE CLASSICS



HEY JUDE - THE BEATLES



LEAN ON ME - BILL WITHERS



WAGON WHEEL - OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW



WE ARE GOING TO BE FRIENDS
- THE WHITE STRIPES



STAND BY ME - BEN E KING



WONDERWALL - OASIS



IMAGINE - THE BEATLES



YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN ME
- RANDY NEWMAN



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND - BOB DYLAN



LEAVIN' ON A JET PLANE - JOHN DENVER

Sometimes families ask about sending iPods and other MP3 devices to camp, as we have a no-tech policy. While we don't allow devices that have cameras, games, or internet connection, here are a couple of audio devices that DO comply with our policy:

- [Mighty Vibe](#) - Allows you to take Spotify or Amazon Music playlists to camp
- [Campfire Player](#) - Allows you to take Spotify or Amazon Music playlists to camp



CampLauncher & the Akeela Launch-A-Thon

At Camp Akeela, we believe in the power of community, kindness, and making a difference in the lives of others. We also know firsthand the transformative power of summer camp. The skills, friendships, and personal growth that come from camp can shape a child's future in powerful ways. That's why it's so important to us to support CampLauncher – to ensure that every child, no matter their background or financial situation, has access to the life-changing benefits of camp.

What is CampLauncher?

CampLauncher is a fantastic non-profit charity that was founded to provide need-based financial assistance for neurodivergent kids and teens to attend summer camps like Akeela. It was started in 2010 by Akeela's directors, Debbie and Eric Sasson.

For a number of years, CampLauncher has partnered with two camps outside of Akeela: MGH Aspire (MA) and Talisman (NC). While those relationships have been absolutely wonderful, the CampLauncher board of directors has determined that it's in the best interest of the organization to return to its roots and focus its scholarship activity on campers attending Camp Akeela or Beyond Akeela.

We're thrilled by this development because it means that all of the generous contributions that Akeela families make via the Launch-A-Thons (and other donations to CampLauncher) will help share the unique Akeela experience with other children. Through CampLauncher's financial aid assistance, the friendships and growth that we are so privileged to witness in our campers can be accessed by a more diverse group of young people.

Akeela Launch-A-Thons: A Vital Fundraiser

One of the key ways we support CampLauncher is through our Launch-A-Thons, an event that takes place in each camp session. More than just a special event, it has become a beloved tradition, with the entire community coming together for a great cause. It's also a critical fundraiser for CampLauncher.

Whether they choose to swim laps, run/jog/walk loops around camp, score basketball hoops, or shoot archery arrows, every camper participates in the Launch-A-Thon. It's a fun and inclusive event that brings everyone together. The spirit of unity and support is palpable, as campers and staff cheer each other on, creating an atmosphere of camaraderie and enthusiasm.

We invite all of our Akeela families (and their friends and supporters!) to recognize their camper's efforts in the Launch-A-Thon with a donation to CampLauncher. Regardless of the size of each gift, every bit of participation makes a difference. We are so proud of our campers' enthusiastic participation in the Launch-A-Thons, and profoundly grateful for the corresponding contributions from their families.



A Review of “The Amazing Generation” and Why Camp is So Important for our Children



I’ve been a fan of Jonathan Haidt’s for a long time. I read his book, [The Coddling of the American Mind](#) (co-authored with Greg Lukianoff), many years ago and it stuck with me in such a profound way. I talk about it all the time with our staff and with colleagues. (If you haven’t read it, you really should!) I also read [The Anxious Generation](#) last year. That’s Jonathan Haidt’s much-discussed book about how the use of cell phones and social media have changed an entire generation.

If you have not yet heard, Haidt has written a book for kids (ages 9-12) called [The Amazing Generation](#). It comes out at the end of the year but I was lucky enough to receive a preview of it last month. The book basically boils the Anxious Generation down into fun and easily digested information for kids. Its message is simple: **life is way more interesting, creative, and joyful when you look up from a screen.** Instead of saying “put the phone away,” it invites kids to rediscover how amazing real life can be – friendships, adventures, nature, and all. I highly recommend that you think about ordering it for your younger camper as a holiday gift! The Amazing Generation was also co-authored by Catherine Price who wrote [How to Break Up with Your Phone](#) (which I loved and reviewed [here](#)).

Of course, I particularly loved that **Haidt lauds summer camps as examples of spaces where children get a break from screens and are able to experience more meaningful and personal connections!** One of the young people highlighted in the text talks about how much she loved being phone-free at summer camp. Needless to say, we couldn’t agree more! As I think specifically about Akeela, I want to recognize that neurodivergent kids often thrive on structure, connection, and hands-on experiences; being without a phone for 3 weeks helps us achieve those goals.

The Amazing Generation helps kids understand why unplugging matters.

- It celebrates real connection. The book shows how face-to-face time beats screen time for feeling truly seen and supported.
- It builds confidence. Just like camp, it encourages safe adventures and trying new things.
- It normalizes screen breaks. Instead of feeling like punishment, unplugging becomes an opportunity.
- It supports self-advocacy. The book helps kids understand the “why” behind limits – so they feel empowered, not restricted.

Have you ever talked to your camper(s) about what it feels like to be screen-free for 3 weeks? We often discuss this aspect of camp with prospective campers before their first summer at Akeela. Perhaps **you can use The Amazing Generation book as a springboard for a similar conversation with your children.** You can preview the wonderful reality that camp relationships are so often different and more satisfying than other friendships, in large part because they are forged in a face-to-face, real-time setting. Maybe your camper can recognize the value of being outside and having “free play” rather than sitting inside on a device. For our returning camp families, ask your children what they loved most about being off screens last summer - and how they can keep that spark alive at home.

At its heart, The Amazing Generation reminds kids (and parents!) that the world is still full of wonder... no Wi-Fi required.

- Debbie

CULINARY CORNER



We're so excited to be revamping our Camper Kitchen, which will be ready for Summer 2026! Get some practice in the kitchen with this favorite camp dessert!

DEBBIE'S BROOKIES RECIPE

FOR THE BROWNIE BATTER

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter melted(113g)
- 3/4 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar (100g)
- 1/2 cup packed light brown sugar (100g)
- 1/3 cup cocoa powder (35g)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract (5ml)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour (65g)

FOR THE COOKIE DOUGH

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter room temperature (113g)
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar (100g)
- 1/4 cup packed light brown sugar (50g)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 large egg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
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- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour (160g)
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

INSTRUCTIONS

- Line a 9x13 baking dish with parchment or foil and heat oven to 350F.

FOR THE BROWNIE BATTER

- Melt butter then stir in cocoa powder. Whisk in both sugar and the salt then add the eggs and vanilla and beat well.
- Add the flour and mix until almost combined then fold in the chocolate chips.
- Transfer the brownie batter to your prepared pan and spread into a thin layer then set aside.

FOR THE COOKIE DOUGH

- Cream the butter and sugars on high for 3-4 minutes or until light and fluffy, scraping the bowl down as needed.
- Mix in the vanilla and egg and scrape the bowl down once more.
- Add salt baking soda and powder then mix until combined.
- Pour in the flour and mix until almost combined then fold in the chocolate chips, reserving a handful to sprinkle on top later. Finish mixing the batter with your spatula then drop spoonfuls onto the brownie batter. You don't need full coverage, it will be nice to see the brownie batter peaking through after baking.
- Cover with foil and bake at 350F for 20 min then bake another 20 min uncovered. Allow to cool before removing from pan and cutting.





CAMPER MAD-LIBS

Directions: Fill in the blanks with words like adjectives, nouns, and verbs, depending on the label under the line. Let your imagination run wild to make it fun and silly! Read the whole piece together once you're finished, and share your results with us!

Every morning when I wake up, I think, " _____"(exclamation)! Only ____ (number) more days until Camp Akeela!" I can practically smell the _____ (adjective) air and hear the _____ (plural noun) echoing across the lake.

This year, I'm determined to try _____ (camp activity). I've been practicing by _____ (verb ending in -ing) every day in my backyard, even when my _____ (family member) says I look completely _____ (adjective).

When I get to camp, I'm going to run straight to my cabin and give my bunkmates a big _____ (noun). I can't wait to see them, and my favorite counselors too, especially _____ (famous person's name). We'll decorate our cubbies with _____ (plural noun) and maybe even invent a secret _____ (noun) to share.

I can't wait for all the activities – from _____ (verb ending in -ing) on the ropes course to _____ (verb ending in -ing) in the art studio. Last year, I made a _____ (adjective) friendship bracelet that somehow turned into a _____ (noun). It was weird but kind of _____ (adjective).

At meals, I'll race to the dining hall when I smell Chef Kendall's _____ (adjective) cooking. His _____ (food) is the best – especially when it's served with a side of _____ (plural noun).

At night, after _____ (camp tradition), we'll gather around the campfire, watching the _____ (adjective) sparks fly into the _____ (color) sky. I can't wait to hear that _____ (adjective) song -- the one that makes my _____ (body part) hurt from laughing so much.

I love the way Akeela makes you feel _____ (emotion) and _____ (emotion). When camp ends, I always feel a little _____ (emotion), but I know the next summer will be even more _____ (adjective) than ever!

Until then, I'll keep my _____ (plural noun) packed and my _____ (piece of clothing) ready, counting the _____ (unit of time, plural) until I'm back at my favorite place in the world – Camp Akeela!

