

Inspiring Programs That Put Campers' Unique Needs First

2017 Eleanor Eells Award Winners

MARCIA ELLETT

Each year, ACA's Eleanor P. Eells Award for Program Excellence recognizes camps that embody the award's namesake by developing superior programming that effectively and creatively responds to the needs of people and society through the camp experience. We commend the 2017 winners. They are all testaments to the power of camp programs that actively seek to realize the potential of the camper populations they serve by better equipping them to take on the world's challenges with resiliency and belief in themselves.



Camp For All 2U

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For 25 years, Camp For All has operated on a "no barriers" philosophy, empowering children and adults with challenging illnesses and special needs and their families to live life to its fullest and experience the sheer joy of camp. Partnering with more than 60 nonprofit organizations, Camp For All hosts nearly 11,000 campers a year, defining them not by any limitations, but by

their spirit and what they *can* do. Still, there were children who would benefit from such an experience who couldn't physically be at camp. So, in the summer of 2014, Camp For All went mobile, taking its barrier-free, traditional camp activities to MD Anderson Children's Cancer Center in Houston, Texas, and Camp For All 2U was born.

"The camp is for patients as well as siblings or children of patients," said Kurt Podeszwa, director at Camp For All. "It allows the

campers to forget about why they are in the hospital, at least for a little while, and experience the fun of camp. We did not want to create just another in-hospital program. We wanted to bring real camp to the hospital."

That means Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., inpatients, outpatients, and their siblings ages five to 18 are placed into "cabins" complete with their own professionally trained cabin counselor. They ride in full-sized canoes (with wheels on the bottom) through the hospital corridors. They fish from balconies.

"We have a portable indoor archery range and go on safaris and hikes. We bring in nature programs, and the campers even get to go outside for a little bit to interact with and learn about our barnyard animals," Podeszwa said.

Seventy-five campers at one hospital for one week experienced the life-transforming camaraderie and high adventure of Camp For All 2U that first summer. This year, Camp For All 2U will serve five hospitals and one bereavement facility for seven weeks, changing the lives of 400 campers.

"We would like the program to grow to even more hospitals," said Podeszwa, "but we plan controlled growth because we want to make sure we keep the quality of the program."