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CAMP FOR ALL

A Camp Where “Can Do” Happens Every Day

WORDS – JOHN SOUSA, PHOTOS – COURTESY OF CAMP FOR ALL



“I guess I have to go home now,” whispered the young girl after coming out of a seizure. Without missing a beat, her counselor said, “No, let’s go to archery!”

That simple, powerful exchange captures the spirit of Camp For All, where challenging illnesses, disabilities, and special needs are met with opportunities to discover life.

THE VISION

In 1993, two Houston physicians who cared for children with special needs, Paul Gerson and Robert Zeller, joined forces with Larry Neuhaus, a parent who lost his child to cancer. They shared a powerful realization that there were very few places where individuals with challenging illnesses, disabilities, or special needs could go to truly get away, have fun, and enjoy a barrier-free environment.

They dreamed of a place that wasn’t just accessible, but transformative—a camp designed from the ground up with inclusion at the forefront. They brought together an architect and a coalition of organizations that served special needs communities to imagine

such a place. Every cabin, sidewalk, and activity were designed to make it possible for everyone to participate fully, safely, and joyfully. Their vision became a reality in 1998 when Camp For All opened its doors and began transforming lives.



A PLACE TO THRIVE

Camp For All has the ability to serve 9,000 campers each year on its 206-acre site in Burton, Texas. Camp For All's fully adaptive programming provides each attendee the magic of camp. Whether it's fishing, canoeing, zip-lining, horseback riding, or tapping into creativity through music, photography, painting, and dance, every camper is encouraged to try (or what Camp For All calls "challenge by choice"), to play, and to thrive in their own way. Beyond the fun, something deeper happens: emotional healing. Campers form friendships, build confidence, and realize that their challenges do not define them.

As one camper put it, "Being at Camp For All was the first time I felt normal and included. I actually felt like a kid." Another shared, "I felt like I had no one. When I went to Camp Spike 'n' Wave at Camp For All, I realized I was not alone."

To ensure that all children have access to the joys of camp, Camp For All also created Camp For All 2U, an innovative partnership with hospitals across the state, including MD Anderson Cancer Center and Texas Children's Hospital. This program brings the spirit and healing power of Camp For All directly to pediatric patients who are unable to leave the hospital.



A PARTNERSHIP MODEL THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE

Camp For All doesn't do this alone. It is supported by generous donors and collaborates with more than 65 nonprofit partner organizations to bring campers to the site. Here's how it works:

- Camp For All provides a fully accessible facility, trained staff, custom meals, and inclusive programming.
- Camp partners bring campers, in-cabin counselors, and medical teams.
- The cost of each camper's experience is shared between Camp For All and its partners. The organization raises more than \$3.1 million annually to cover more than half the cost, ensuring as many children and adults as possible can attend. Most of the campers come for free.



MEETING THE GROWING NEED

As Texas's population grows, so does the need. More children are being diagnosed with challenges, and more families are seeking the kind of transformative support Camp For All offers. To meet this rising demand, Camp For All is raising funds to build a second camp with the goal of serving 16,000 mission campers each year.

LEADING WITH HEART

At the helm of Camp For All is President and CEO Pat Prior Sorrells, a passionate advocate for disability rights and mental health. For nearly 20 years, she has led the organization with vision, empathy, and relentless dedication. Her leadership has earned her multiple accolades, including being named one of Houston's Most Admired CEOs in 2019 and a Woman Who Means Business in 2021 by the Houston Business Journal.

It's not the accolades that matter to Sorrells. It's stories like the camper who thought



she'd have to go home after a seizure and instead went to archery—something she never imagined she'd be able to do. That camper is now a child life specialist and married with children of her own. She credits that single moment at Camp For All as the one that changed her life.

BE PART OF THE MAGIC

Camp For All isn't just a camp. It's a place where joy replaces fear, ability replaces limitation, and hope takes root. Whether you give, volunteer, or share the story, you become part of a community that's rewriting what's possible.

Learn more about Camp For All and helping with their mission by visiting www.campforall.org.

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