



2017 Summer Camp Outcomes Report



a seriousfun camp

BACKGROUND

The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp (THITWGC) was founded by Paul Newman with one simple premise in mind – that every child, no matter their illness, could experience the transformational spirit and friendships that go hand-in-hand with camp. Through eight week-long residential summer camp sessions, Camp seeks to provide these experiences to children coping with cancer, blood disorders, hemophilia, sickle cell, metabolic disease and other rare and serious diseases, as well as their healthy siblings.

As part of The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp’s ongoing efforts to document the impact of our work and to learn from systematically-collected evidence what areas to target for program improvement and camper support, we engaged in formal evaluations for the last six years. This report reflects the 2017 evaluation.

Research and evaluation at Camp supports continuous innovation, promotes program quality, and ensures the safety, well-being and positive development of campers and families. Far from being a burden, campers shared much enthusiasm and gratitude for participating in the evaluation, often expressing the sentiment, “My voice gets to be heard by Camp.”

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to explore campers’ and parents/caregivers’ perceptions of Camp, especially about making friends, trying new things and choices. We also asked campers about how much fun they had at structured programs. Both campers and parents/caregivers also provided answers to open-ended questions. We thank the hundreds of people who took time to answer our questions!

Methods

98% of parents and caregivers gave their children permission to participate in the evaluation. Evaluation participants completed the questionnaires on their last afternoon at Camp, using iPads with the iSurvey app. A collaborative approach toward scale creation included conversations and review with key program staff. Scale reliabilities were very good and excellent, ranging from .820 to .906, indicating that campers responded predictably to questions. Parents/caregivers were emailed or mailed surveys after their children’s sessions concluded, and some were phoned.

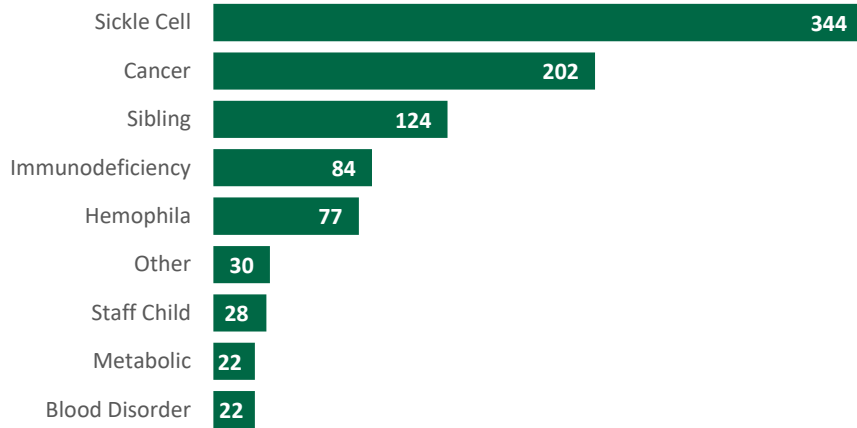
858 of 941 (91%) campers completed surveys. Participants aged 10 and older completed the eight-item “Interest in Exploration” scale (American Camp Association Camp Youth Outcomes Battery, 2011). Interest in Exploration is an indicator of *thriving*, which is important for our campers.

319 of 801 (40%) parents/caregivers with emails (the remaining parents/caregivers were called or mailed surveys) also completed surveys after each session. Parents/caregivers answered three questions about their children’s Interest in Exploration and about choices and comfort with medical care at camp. Both campers and parents/caregivers answered open-ended questions about their experiences.

*Special thanks to **Samantha Gay** (Research and Evaluation Assistant) for her incredible help with data collection and analysis for this evaluation.*

ABOUT OUR CAMPERS

941 children attended Camp this summer.

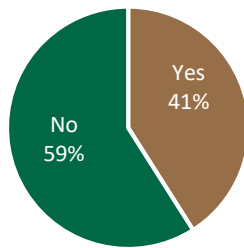


Average age of campers:

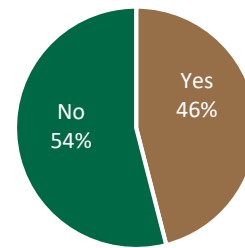
11.8

One-hundred and thirty-one campers came from Connecticut Children’s Hospital, 130 from Boston Children’s Hospital and 84 from Yale-New Haven Hospital. The remaining campers came from other hospitals around the Northeast, some from the Midwest, and some from abroad.

Attend another camp?

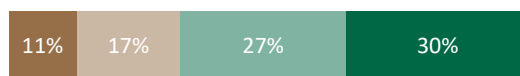


Live in a big city?



Most campers **did not** miss a lot of school last year.

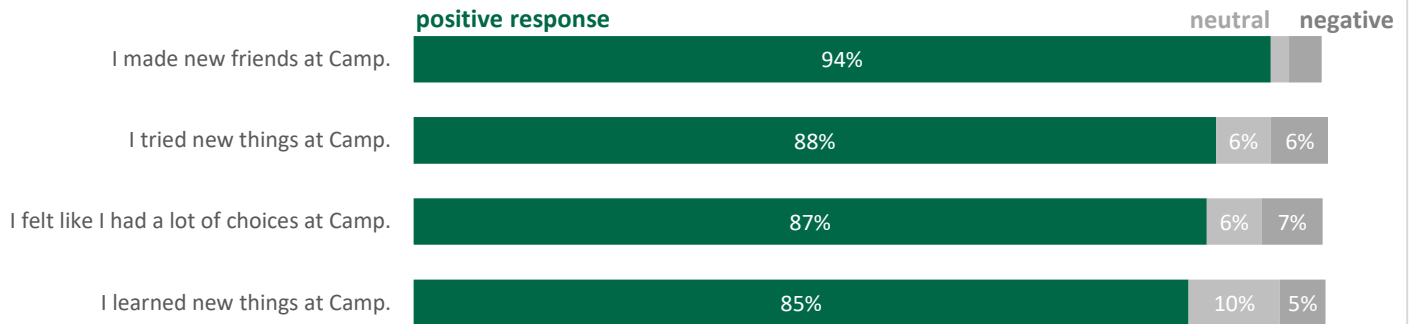
I/My child missed a lot of school this past year



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

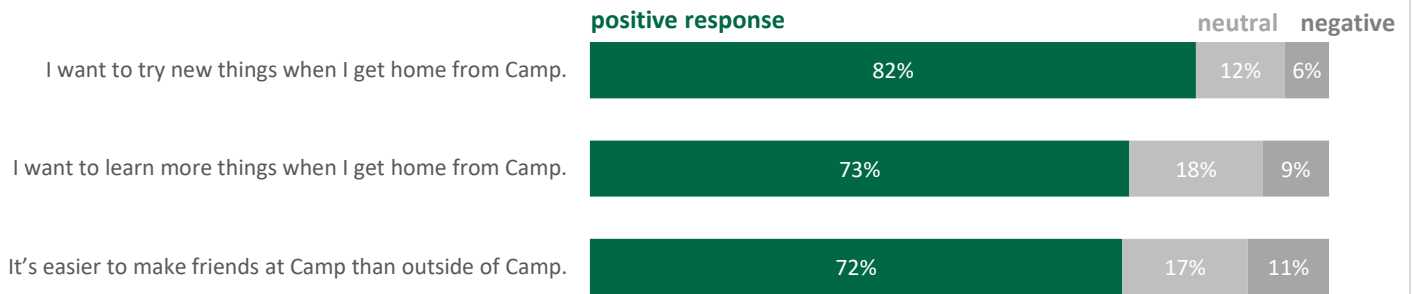
RESULTS

Most campers had very positive experiences at Camp.



% of campers agreeing with these statements.

Compared to home...

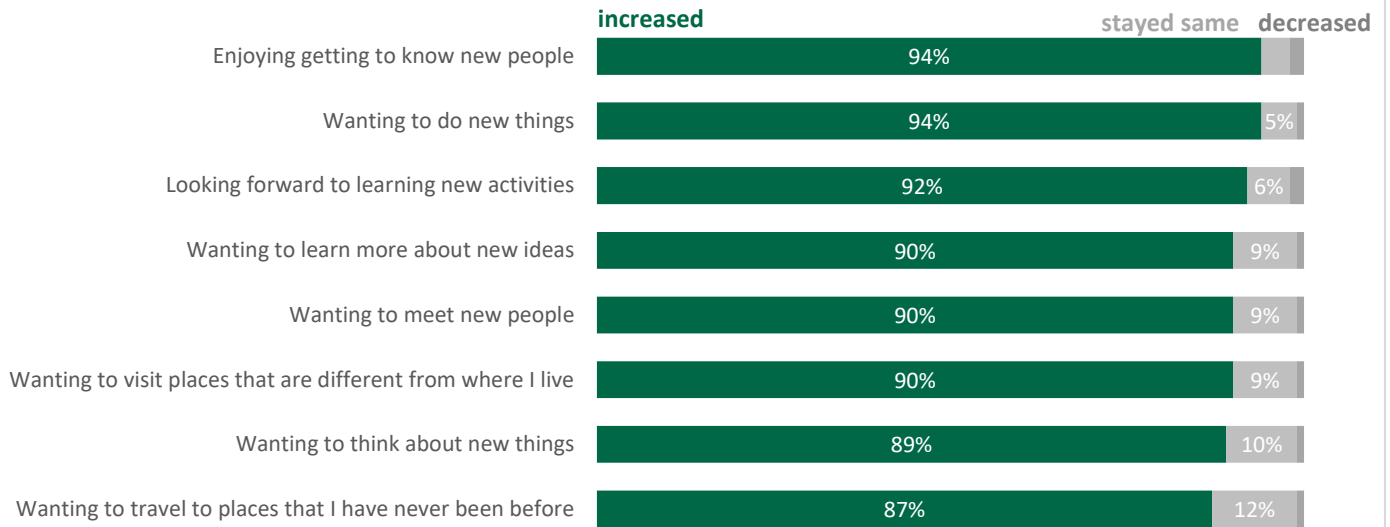


% of campers agreeing with these statements.

Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for this scale was .825, indicating very good reliability in how campers answered these questions.



Campers reported increases in their **Interest in Exploration**.

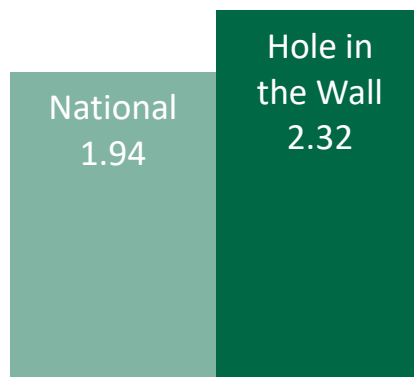


Interest in Exploration average: 2.32 (*SD*: .69) on a scale of -1: decreased, 0: did not increase or decrease, 1: increased a little, 2: increased some, and 3: increased a lot.

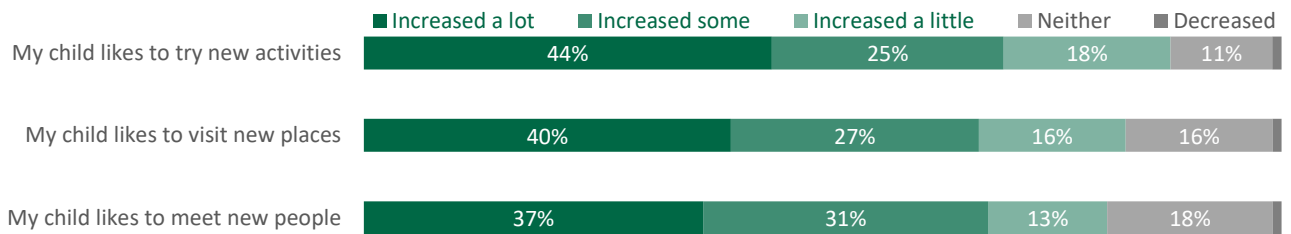
Reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for this scale was .906, indicating excellent reliability in how campers answered these questions.

How does Interest in Exploration at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp compare to campers from a national sample of resident camps?

After adjusting the national average to reflect the scale used at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, we found that The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp’s campers’ Interest in Exploration ($M = 2.32, SD = .69$) was statistically significantly and moderately more than the national sample ($M = 1.94, SD = .85$), with a Cohen’s *d* effect size of .49, meaning that the difference was of medium magnitude.



Parents/Caregivers reported their children increased their **Interest in Exploration**.



Percentages don't always add to 100% due to rounding error.

Average Interest in Exploration increase: 1.9 (SD: 1.0) on a scale of -1 to 3.

Parent/Caregiver quotes about other changes in their children:

She has been more confident. Going up to new kids at the beach and introducing herself!

When I picked her up, she was so talkative and mature about her experiences at camp. Wow! It's so great to see that in her, and to know that she had so much fun, too.

My child is much more independent -- both with taking charge of his medical condition and in general. Also, he is much happier.

My son had a terrific time at camp as he was on his own without his parents and felt like a big boy. He feels like he can make decisions and navigate life better.

My son tends to be quite shy, I was amazed at how easily he made friends and has kept in touch with them since camp ended!

I was told by a few people, including my doctor, how much my child would love camp. Well, it took a while to let him go, but it was the best decision I ever made. I got back a child with such a brighter outlook on life. It's beautiful to witness. As a parent, all I've ever wanted, was that he feel comfortable in his skin, despite his challenges. A million thanks!

His spirits and empathy and understanding of illnesses is always improved and he always learns new ways to cope and knew ways to make other people feel better. Camp is just a very good place to form a healthy mind and body when dealing with terminal illness. He sometimes thinks about the what ifs and when he goes to camp it totally reminds him how to deal. Sometimes it's because he hangs with another child going through similar situation and sometimes it's talking to counselors but it's always positive. He also wants to be a camp counselor when he's older. Thanks for everything.

She is willing to try different things, such as swimming on her own

I love that my child comes home with empathy towards others and is seeking opportunities to help others

Her confidence level is incredible. She got a glimpse into how awesome of a person she truly is.

He knows there are other kids like him. He now knows he is not the only one who gets infusions. Thank you for giving him the opportunity to meet other children with the same diagnosis.

She came home saying she doesn't care if she's ever judged again. She always wants to be herself.

My son and daughters always comes home so energized with positive feelings and new friends. Life at home and in "the real world" can sometimes be hectic, crazy, and stressful. At camp, they have a place to be themselves, free of judgement, able to try new things, and relax!!!! Camp has had such a positive effect on my kids and we are blessed to have been able to send them to you.

Parents/caregivers reported that their children had **choices** at Camp.

■ Positive Response ■ Neutral or negative



Parents/caregivers reported that their children **made friends** at Camp.

■ Positive Response ■ Neutral or negative



Parents/caregivers trusted the **medical care** at Camp.

■ Positive Response ■ Neutral or negative



■ Exceeded expectations ■ Met expectations



Comments from parents/caregivers about Camp's medical care:

The staff is wonderful and the infirmary staff make you feel like your child is front and center which is so important.

The medical team at camp is what help me to send my children back to the camp. It is a huge plus among other things that the camp offers.

I am absolutely confident and feel reassured when my child goes to Hole in the Wall camp. It's the only place I will let him go at this time.

He felt comfortable and confident learning to infuse himself this summer because of the excellent support he had at HITWGC.

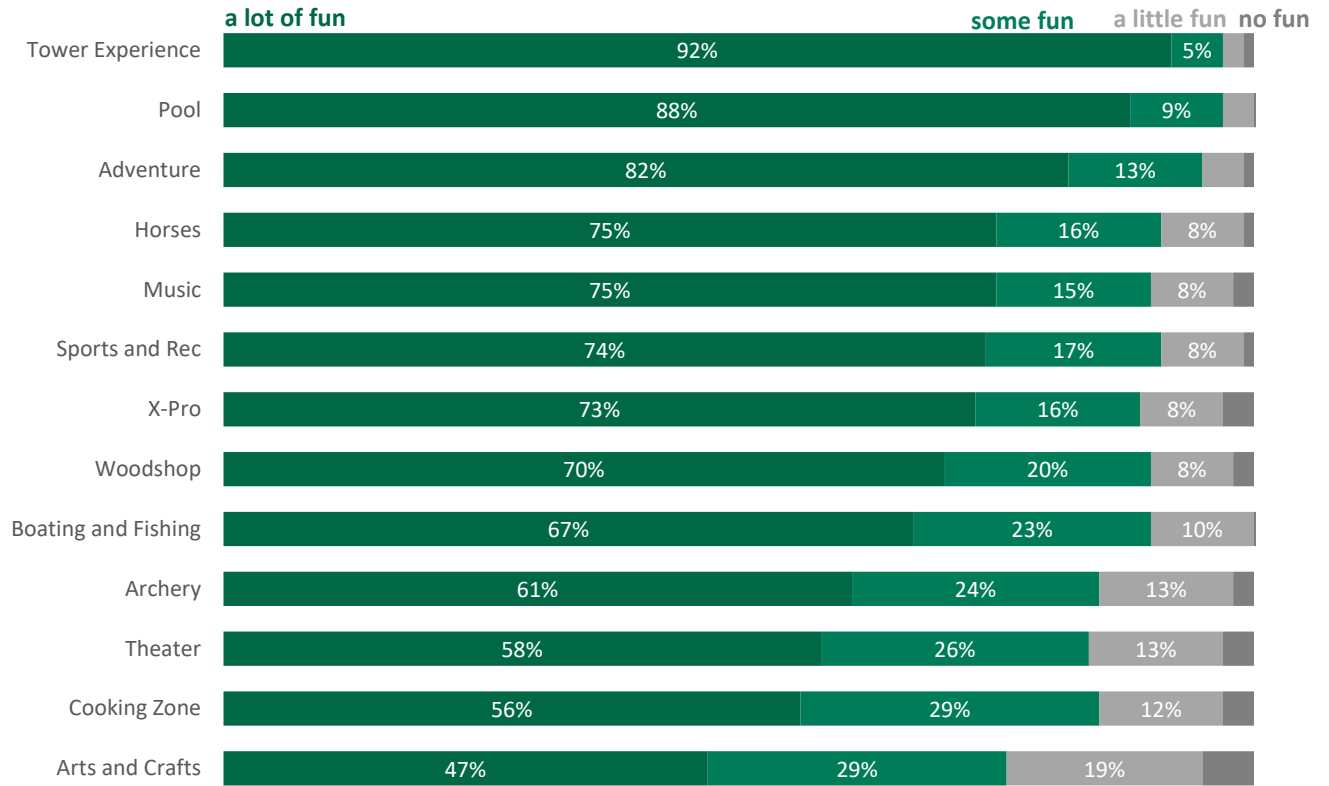
This was the first time I felt completely at ease with having my child away from home for an extended period of time and not worry.

The camp Staff from beginning and throughout the whole time my daughter was there was nothing more than exceptional with communication to me when it came to her medical needs.



Campers had lots of fun during Day Programs.

Favorites were Tower and Pool.



Percentages don't always add to 100% due to rounding error.

The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the "fun" scale was .820, indicating very good reliability.

Campers had lots of fun in Evening Programs.

Favorites were Stage Night and Carnivarty.



Percentages don't always add to 100% due to rounding error.

The overall average for Program Fun was 2.6 (SD: .33) on a scale of 0: no fun, 1: a little fun, 2: some fun, and 3: a lot of fun.

Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the Fun scale was .820, indicating very good reliability in how campers answered these questions.

DIGGING DEEPER

Did AGE make a difference to camper outcomes?

YES.

- On a scale of 0-3 with 3 indicating “a lot of fun,” younger campers (7-11) reported slightly more fun ($m = 2.68$, $SD = .31$) than older campers ($m = 2.58$, $SD = .34$), ($p < .001$, $d = .30$), consistent with previous years.
- Younger campers (7-11) reported slightly fewer positive outcomes ($m = 4.14$, $SD = .78$) than older campers ($m = 4.25$, $SD = .76$). ($p < .05$, $d = .14$).

Did it matter to camper outcomes if campers reported more fun?

YES.

- The more fun campers had, the more positive outcomes they reported ($R^2 = .05$, $p < .001$).
- The more fun campers had, the more increases in Interest in Exploration they reported ($R^2 = .18$, $p < .001$).

However, the relationship between fun and these two outcomes is slight and no changes in programming are indicated.

Did CABIN or SESSION make a difference to camper outcomes?

Nope! There were no statistically significant differences between cabins or sessions, indicating a very consistent program across the summer and between the cabins.

Did it matter to camper outcomes if campers lived in a city or attended another camp?

Nope! Attending another camp in the summer or living in a city did not make a difference to camper outcomes for campers or parents/caregivers.

Did it matter to camper outcomes if campers missed a lot of school the previous year?

Nope! Missing or not missing a lot of school did not make a difference to camper outcomes for campers or parents/caregivers.

What did campers like best about Camp?

Campers shared their favorite moments, which are organized below according to size, with the most frequently mentioned being the largest.



Selected camper responses to the question “What did you like best about Camp?”

Getting the experience to make new friends, try new things, and to overall feel welcome at the Hole in the Wall Gang. I learned many things about myself and others and hope I can keep learning.

The positive energy that everyone shows and how I feel safe to be myself and not feel judged.

The best thing about camp is the counselor are very nice and you can connect with kids who understand what you have been through. Also, everyone is very supportive and loving and you are never left out no matter what. The counselors take care of you whenever you need it.

All the activities and freedom and how nice the counselors are. I come here and I'm able to share my story and people actually understand how I feel. There's nothing here that's not bad. THIS IS THE BEST PLACE ON EARTH!!!

Meeting new kids, and having friend time. All the activities are really fun but when I'm with these kids just like me struggling the same there is that instant connection and we become brothers.

I love meeting new people, and supporting everyone and showing off my talents to people. And forming new relationships with new people, and showing newbies around the awesomeness that is camp.

Seeing people who have gone through the same things as me, and we don't even need to talk about it like you do outside of camp, where nobody knows unless you tell them. At camp, we all are together. Outside of camp, you need to explain so many things to other people. Why you are gone all the time, and stuff like that. Camp is the greatest place in the world for kids like me. I felt no frustration about my challenges at camp, because my challenges were "the norm" here. I felt like I belonged here. I love camp.

What would campers change about Camp?



Most campers would change NOTHING about Camp. Some campers wanted to stay longer. Some campers wanted changes in facilities such as trampolines or a bigger pool. Some campers wanted later bed times and little or no rest hour. Several campers had specific suggestions for program areas and activities. Some campers wanted more choices and less supervision. Some wanted different food or more juice. Several campers wished that younger campers could do Tower, XPro, and stay up later. A few campers wanted to use their phones or tablets.

What were the top words parents/caregivers used to describe Camp?



What did parents/caregivers say about their children's experiences?

He does not get to have play dates etc., so sometimes he is socially awkward. It doesn't matter at camp, he can be him and have no worries because everyone is dealing with something, so they are there to just have fun together.

Loved that a counselor was always present including bedtime to keep mischief down while allowing for independence and opportunities to make new friends

One of our favorite things about camp (which our daughter has no idea about). She was in a cabin with 6 other girls. When we picked her up we asked about the girls who were with her. When we asked what their diagnoses were, she had no clue!! We loved that they just were kids and didn't actually speak about why they were all there.

My child makes lifelong friends in a week at camp, easier than she does after years in school... Because at camp, she is 100% herself.

Elsa expressed, unprompted, that camp was the first time that she felt that everyone "got her" and that she never felt like she had to force herself to do things when she was exhausted. She felt relaxed about being encouraged to rest during rest time and being allowed to ride the golf carts when fatigued.

She had the most amazing time! The day she came home, later in the afternoon she actually said (and was truly sincere) "mom, is it possible to feel homesickness.., but not for home...but for camp?" We can't thank you guys enough for giving her this experience.

My daughter felt she was liberated from having to explain or from feeling odd about her condition.

My son feels his best when he's at camp. It's his happy place.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bottom Line



The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp provides children with strong opportunities for choice, friendships, and Interest in Exploration. Parents and caregivers agreed, and also commented positively on the medical care their children received at Camp. Overall, campers reported having fun at Camp, indicating that fun and positive outcomes can occur together.



After five summers of examining campers' fun reports of day and evening programs, it has become clear that:

1. Pool and Tower, Stage Night and Carnivarty are always the most fun activities.
2. Arts & Crafts and Opening Campfire are always the least fun activities.
3. The amount of fun predicts other outcomes. More fun = better outcomes.
4. "Friends" is always campers' top favorite moment or thing they like best about Camp.
5. More information is needed about what makes each program area more or less fun.



Camper recommendations seem to shift each year. While most campers would change nothing or would make Camp longer, trends emerge in specific cabins, such as wanting less rest time, younger campers wanting to do what the older campers do, and minor complaints about the cabins or interactions in the cabins. Further, Camp should examine the qualities of Arts & Crafts and Opening Campfire to determine how to make them more fun.



Parents/caregivers aligned with campers in their perceptions that Camp offers strong opportunities for campers to experience choice, friendships, and exploration.



Certainly, some limitations exist for this evaluation. First, campers reported about themselves, which can sometimes be unreliable and inaccurate. Second, because campers did the surveys at the end of their camp sessions, they might have been experiencing an elation that inflated their answers. Third, parents/caregivers might have inflated their answers because they wanted to believe that their investment of time and effort to get their children to Camp was worthwhile.

**Even with these limitations, the positive direction of camper outcomes is clear.
The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp makes a difference to campers.**

APPENDIX

Camper Scale Performance and Items

Scale	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive Outcomes (range: 1-5) M = 4.29; SD = .56 $\alpha = .841$ Inter-item range .29 to .70 rFun = .21 (p<.001)	I felt like I had a lot of choices at Camp.	4.26	.97
	I made new friends at Camp.	4.57	.83
	I learned new things at Camp.	4.25	.943
	I tried new things at Camp.	4.35	.98
	I want to learn more things when I get home from Camp.	3.93	1.0
	I want to try new things when I get home from Camp.	4.13	.973
	It's easier to make friends at Camp than outside of Camp.	4.02	1.2
Interest in Exploration (range: -1 – 3) M = 2.32; SD = .69 $\alpha = .906$ Inter-item range .40 to .70 rFun = .42 (p<.001)	Wanting to meet new people	2.04	1.0
	Looking forward to learning new activities	2.23	.98
	Wanting to learn more about new ideas	2.09	1.0
	Enjoying getting to know new people	2.41	.938
	Wanting to travel to places that I have never been before	2.12	1.1
	Wanting to do new things	2.33	.95
	Wanting to think about new things	2.12	1.1
	Wanting to visit places that are different from where I live	2.24	1.0
Fun (range: 0-3) M = 2.62; SD = .33	19 day and evening programs (e.g., Pool, Horses, Arts & Crafts, Carnivarty).		

For more information, contact Ann Gillard, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp: 860-429-3444, ext. 116 or Ann.Gillard@holeinthewallgang.org

Recommended citation:
 The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp. (2017). Summer camp outcomes report. Ashford, CT: Author