A Place to Call Home
Family Camp Focused on Rare Diseases Offers Support to a Truly Unique Community

The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp has always been a safe haven for those facing serious illness, providing an escape from the loneliness and isolation that is so often encountered in their everyday lives. Camp has also been dedicated to building a community of support that embraces the entire family, and it continues to expand its efforts to reach those families that are the most isolated—those with children facing incredibly rare illnesses.

This summer, for the first time ever, Hole in the Wall hosted a Family Camp specifically for families of children with rare diseases. These families often never meet anyone else coping with the same diagnosis. Some have children with illnesses so rare that they don’t even have a diagnosis. Working closely with the National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD), Camp offered these families something they don’t frequently experience—the opportunity to let go and have fun while all their medical needs were expertly tended to. Some of them even met families with a shared diagnosis for the very first time.

“One of the biggest issues facing the families we serve is just fitting in,” said Lisa Phelps, director of marketing and community relations for NORD. “We want to be a partner and resource to these families. Recognizing the value Hole in the Wall provides in helping them feel normal and part of something bigger and better, we couldn’t wait to be a part of Family Camp.”

During four days in early June, 24 families gathered at Camp to experience all that Hole in the Wall offers. What they found was a place where acceptance was the norm, and they had the opportunity to let go and have fun while all their medical needs were expertly tended to. Some of them even met families with a shared diagnosis for the very first time.

“At Camp, you can let your guard down because everyone there has their own challenges,” said Irfan Patel, who attended with his wife and children. “It really puts your life in perspective—you realize you are not alone, and you can just be yourself. It’s a huge burden off of your shoulders.”

Similar to Camp’s Family Weekends, each family in attendance is supported by their own Family Pals—counselors who help facilitate the fun and ensure parents are afforded the time to interact with other parents.

“One of the most amazing things about Family Camp was the parent chat,” said Camp’s Medical Director Sharon Space. “As the parents shared their stories, they were amazed to learn how much they had in common. They were able to share resources as well as support. It was really inspiring to see.”

The children, too, gain so much from the experience.

“I have four children: Yusuf, Miriam, Khadija and Ibrahim,” said Irfan. “My oldest, Yusuf, who faces medical challenges, got a big boost of confidence at the climbing wall, while my third child, Khadija, who also faces medical challenges and is ordinarily very shy, found the one place where she opened herself up to activities.”

As Camp continues to expand its offerings, these families will continue to be a growing focus.

“There are 30 million people looking for support,” said Lisa. “Hole in the Wall can provide a really unique and transformative experience for those families who get to take advantage of it.”

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From the CEO

Connections. When I think about one of the universal experiences Camp brings to our families – and a resounding theme of this issue – it’s connections. Since our founding, the connections made by the campers with the staff and each other have always been at the heart of what Paul Newman described as “a different kind of healing.” Over the years, when our programs expanded to serve siblings, parents, caregivers and hospitalized children, additional connections were made as our year-round services provided more frequent Camp touchpoints for families. This allowed Hole in the Wall to become so much more than a physical place or momentary escape.

As I reflect on the summer, I smile when I think of all the connections made during eight weeklong sessions and at our Family Camp for those coping with very rare diseases. We always tell our campers on the final night of their session that they can stay “connected” to Camp by bringing Camp back to their worlds and sharing the kindness, acceptance and friendship that defines our community with those in and around their homes. When they do this, they make Camp happen then and there.

Camp can happen anywhere, at any time. Meaningful connections were also made in Philadelphia this summer when our Hospital Outreach Program took over CHOP for CampWeek, which brought Hole in the Wall mischief to every corner of the hospital; as our CampOut staff brought fun activities right to camper homes and also hosted a drive-in movie night in Wickham Park for some of our regional families; and as our Boston alumni enjoyed a Red Sox Game together in Fenway Park. Rest assured, these connections will go on and on, continuing during our fall and spring weekends and beyond.

Hole in the Wall connections are as enduring as they are endless – a fitting testament to a community united by our Founder’s dream. Thank you for staying connected to us, and for making these and so many more Camp connections possible.

What’s New at Camp

Summer is always a busy time here at Camp, and this year was no exception, with exciting news and events in the works.

We are over-the-moon happy that our tower is being turned into a more robust high ropes course thanks to a generous gift from longtime Camp friends Mike and Eileen Kolakowski. The new course, which has been named Henry’s High Hopes Course and Audrey’s Air Lines after Mike’s parents, is being created with Project Adventure, a respected leader in adventure-based experiential programming. The new course will allow our younger campers to participate in various activities with tiered, progressive learning experiences that culminate in the senior camper tower climb.

We’re also thrilled to be expanding our Change of Pace Experience (COPE) program for parents. To make the program more accessible to all camper parents, Hole in the Wall is now offering regional, one-day retreats and reunions, providing the healing power of traditional COPE weekends without the need for travel or overnight childcare. The new format also allows parents to get to know other parents from their area, helping to build the support network for our families.

Our celebrity friends have been very active these past few months as well. In August, actors Luke Wilson and Dane DeHaan represented Camp at the Travelers Championship Pro-Am. Both also joined our campers in the celebrity mini-golf tournament, putting their putt-putt skills on display while showing their support for Hole in the Wall.

In September, actress and Camp board member Bridget Moynahan once again participated in the BGC and GFI Charity Day events. Bridget joined professional traders on the stock exchange floor to make trades and represent Camp. All the commissions for the day are donated to hundreds of charities, including Hole in the Wall.

In this issue and the coming months, you’ll start to see some new logos featuring our beloved Bandit and fun new color treatments to identify our broader program areas including Hospital Outreach, Family Outreach, Alumni and FUNraisers, our peer-to-peer fundraising program, which includes our athletic and community events, as well as our Kids for Camp program.

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Camp Holiday Tribute Cards Are Here!

Share some Camp spirit by recognizing clients, family and friends with Camp’s holiday tribute cards this holiday season. Featuring several choices of camper artwork, Camp’s holiday cards let you make a donation to Camp on behalf of others. Order today at www.holeinthewallgang.org/holiday or contact Maureen Farrington at maureen.farrington@holeinthewallgang.org or 203-772-0522.

Camp CEO Jimmy Canton shares a Carnivarty smile with one of the nearly 1,100 campers who attended Hole in the Wall this summer.
Special events help our hospital partners experience Camp magic in big and beautiful ways. No matter the location, a sense of community fills the air, as children, family members and hospital staff all join together in the laughter and excitement. This was the experience once again this summer at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), when our Hospital Outreach Program (HOP) teams took over the hospital for CampWeek, bringing a full week of Camp programming that ranged from Carnivarty to the WoodShop500 and teams took over the hospital for Hospital Outreach Program (HOP) of Philadelphia (CHOP), when our summer at the Children’s Hospital.

Stories from current and former camper families.

Camper families from across Connecticut gathered together at Wickham Park in Manchester to experience what was once a summertime rite of passage – a drive-in movie. But this one, organized by CampOut, had a Hole in the Wall twist: All of the “cars” were crafted by hand.

“We had so much fun at the drive-in movie,” said Camper Mom Kathy Platt. “The kids loved the popcorn and park, and just being with their friends, and our family was able to get some needed time together.”

Even a heat advisory couldn’t keep Camp families away, and the steamy night didn’t dampen the fun.

After filling up on an outstanding buffet dinner courtesy of Camp friends Clarke Corporation, campers and their families put their creative energy to work. With only their imaginations as the limit, families created colorful cardboard cars decorated with lightning bolts, duct-tape roses, starry skies and more.

Camper families then took their nifty new rides and giggled their way through the bubble blast car wash before going through the rigors of a driving test. Taking on a variety of driving challenges, everyone proved they had what it takes to hit the road and were rewarded with a driver’s license.

As the sun began to set, it was time to take in the movie. As children relaxed in their cardboard cars with popcorn and other treats, they enjoyed a series of Pixar shorts, while their parents moved inside the cabin for their own activities. Parents sipped fancy lemonade and nibbled on gourmet popcorn while gathered around tables discussing their Camp experiences. It was a great opportunity for everyone to learn more about the ways Camp can support their families.

“Hole in the Wall provides us with opportunities to do things we wouldn’t have done before with new, amazing friends,” Kathy said.

As the final credits rolled, families headed home in their real cars with their hearts full of Camp love and plenty of long-lasting Hole in the Wall memories.

What’s New at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp Hospital Outreach Program

The New Jersey HOP team is now offering bi-monthly evening groups at PSE&G Children’s Specialized Hospital, providing regular doses of fun and friendship to children who often have extended stays.

The Boston HOP team offered multiple Camp Days at Boston Children’s Hospital and MassGeneral Hospital for Children this summer. The team also hosted Slime Day this fall at MassGeneral.

The Central New England HOP team once again joined forces with Connecticut Children’s Medical Center to offer programming for Super Hero Day.
Our 2016 Summer

This summer, nearly 1,100 children entered Camp’s gates for a week of joy and Hole in the Wall, they all experienced plenty of fun, friendship and laughter. To kick off the summer facing rare diseases. No matter the experience, everyone found a community.
Summer Programs

Magic. Whether they participated in the summer program, Hero’s Journey or as an LIT, Camp hosted its first ever Family Camp dedicated to families of children of support and acceptance, where the impossible became possible.
On Saturday, September 17, Camp hosted its 26th Fandango Benefit Gala under picture-perfect blue skies. More than 350 donors gathered together to enjoy the sunshine and Camp love while raising more than $1.3 million for Hole in the Wall’s growing programs.

The day kicked off with gourmet food trucks and a clambake, as well as cocktails and hors d’oeuvres on the Dining Hall lawn, with entertainment provided by the band The Barnstorm. As guests mingled with old and new friends, they enjoyed the silent auction, which included many exciting items like tickets to the Broadway sensation Hamilton; a weekend stay at a private Italian villa; and autographed memorabilia from Muhammad Ali, Sigourney Weaver, Joe Montana, Mindy Kaling, Sylvester Stallone, Kevin Costner, Tom Cavanagh, Tim Wakefield and more.

As the day continued, guests moved into the gym for a short program and Live Auction featuring actor and comedian Michael Ian Black. Bidding began with a loaf of banana bread—paying homage to the slice of banana bread Paul Newman tried to auction off at the press conference announcing his plans to build Camp, exactly 30 years prior. The items up for bid included tickets to a live taping of Saturday Night Live, an opportunity to spend election night with Stephen Colbert and to spend election night with George among the once-in-a-lifetime offerings. As the auction came to a close, camper Giana shared her Camp story and how Hole in the Wall helped her overcome her fears and live life to its fullest.

Then it was time for the Fandango performance featuring 11 extraordinarily talented campers—Brenden, Dimitri, Emily, Fred, Jessica, Jerty, Kiana, Martina, Ngozso, Vanessa and Varda. They appeared in a camp-themed performance alongside celebrity friends Dane DeHaan, Anna Wood, Bridget Moynahan, Aasif Mandvi, Natalie Merchant and more.

Following the memorable performance, everyone made their way outside to enjoy a buffet dinner under the stars. The evening concluded with dancing to music by The Barnstorm and a make-your-own s’mores station amid tiki torches and twinkling lights.

Amazing athletes wrangle friends and family to support Camp

Jim Levine and his wife, Maria, have participated in the Camp Challenge Ride for the past four years as part of Team Jake, a group cycling in memory of a former camper. This year, though, it became a true family affair, with three generations joining in the fun.

“Our family is constantly looking for positive forces in our lives that are all about giving back and philanthropy,” said Jim. “Camp Challenge is always awesome and magical and extremely fulfilling for the entire family. It’s one of our favorite days of the year.”

Jim and Maria once again bicycled to support Camp. They were joined by their son, Zach, and Jim’s brother, Tom, who both volunteered last year. Additionally, their daughter, Nicole, who also volunteered last year, joined the 5K. And for the first time, Jim’s mom, Catherine, made the trip down to volunteer at the event.

The family feels a special connection to Camp, as Nicole was diagnosed with cancer when she was nine. Though she never attended Hole in the Wall, she received visits from Jimmy, one of Camp’s Hospital Outreach specialists.

“What Camp is doing is heavenly,” Jim said. “It’s impossible not to feel completely compelled to help as soon as you set foot on the grounds.”

Jim and his family were among a group of nearly 500 cyclists, runners, walkers and volunteers who participated in this year’s Camp Challenge Ride and Bandit 5K. In all, the event raised more than $200,000 for Camp’s growing programs, while providing a fun-filled day for the family.

“Simplistically speaking, as a cyclist, the ride is awesome,” Jim said. “The event allows my kids to be kids, but with an appropriate level of seriousness about helping people who need this. Being able to give back in some way is very meaningful for them.”

To learn more about getting active for Camp and becoming a FUNraiser, contact Andrea Keefe, manager, peer-to-peer programs, at andrea.keefe@holeinthewallgang.org or 203-777-0522.
Saddle Up for Camp

Camp is at the epicenter of a caring community. Our gratitude goes out to all who host and organize fundraising events in support of Camp’s mission.

When an entire community gets together, it is capable of amazing things. Mike Barnett has proven this many times over as a FUNraiser and host of The Barnett Luncheon in support of Camp, which has been held every year since 1997.

“When Paul Newman started the Camp, I thought ‘What a wonderful thing to do for these kids,’” Mike said.

The event – which Mike hosted at his auto-body shop in Norwich, Connecticut, up until 2014 – has raised more than $110,000 for Hole in the Wall. At the community-wide luncheon, individuals donate what they can and enjoy a meal that includes something for everyone.

“We do all the cooking on the premises, and everyone’s invited to come out,” said Mike. “Even people you don’t get along with – on that day, they are there offering support.”

The offerings include ham, turkey, leg of lamb, roast beef, seafood, salads and more. Norwich community friends, including Seafood Etc., Salem Prime Cuts and Vociatura Bakery, provide free or deeply discounted food to support the event.

Though Mike is retired now, Bob and Fawn Kleemann have taken over and host the luncheon at Kleemann Service Center in Norwich. The Kleemanns were excited to jump right in, and Mike and his family plan to continue their involvement for many years to come.

To learn more about hosting or joining an event, contact Andrea Keefe, manager, peer-to-peer programs, at andrea.keefe@holeinthewallgang.org or 203-772-0522.

The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp never sells or shares its donor names and addresses. This policy reflects our commitment as a charity to maintain the highest integrity in order to protect and ensure privacy, while building a personal relationship with each donor.
Eleven of the singiest, danciest Hole in the Wall camper stars brought down the house at this year’s Fandango Benefit Gala.

To learn more, look inside and support acceptance, community and hands at Camp, a non-profit camp.

http://www.holeinthewallgang.org

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