The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp has always been guided by Founder Paul Newman’s spirit of innovation, with the staff constantly searching for new ways to provide hope and healing regardless of the situation or location. Starting as a summer program, the organization has grown to include fall and spring Family Weekends, Hospital Outreach programming in more than 40 locations, and Family Outreach home visits, parent and caregiver retreats and regional events.

So, in March, when the world changed in an instant and we found ourselves facing unprecedented challenges, the entire organization began to pivot with a purpose amid the COVID-19 pandemic. “Right when this all started, we knew it was our responsibility to continue our mission and provide a different kind of healing” in different ways,” said Camp’s Chief Program Officer Hilary Axtmayer. “We were hearing from our families that they were facing even more challenges and were feeling even more isolated, and we knew that they needed the magic of Camp now more than ever.”

Within days, the Hole in the Wall staff mobilized and began offering virtual story time sessions, crafts and other activities across its social media channels, including daily programming on Facebook Live so that campers and families could interact with their friends from Hole in the Wall in real time. And while the content provided helpful distractions and meaningful connections for families, Hole in the Wall knew it needed to go further. “Simultaneously with creating social media content, we began developing virtual and alternative programs to mirror all of Camp’s in-person programming,” Hilary said. “And what we started seeing, once again, is that so much of the magic of Camp is in the connections and the opportunity to share experiences with others who just get it. It’s more than a physical space or place. It is a community, a spirit, a way of being.”

Family Weekends were the first program offerings to be hosted virtually via Zoom in mid-April. Over three weekends, 43 families were able to enjoy our traditional opening campfire, breakfast sing song, afternoon activities, Stage Night performances and more. For families, the opportunity to be silly and connect with others was just what they needed.

At the same time, the Hospital Outreach program (HOP) began filming Camp-style games and activities to be streamed via closed circuit TV stations within our partner hospitals, and the staff also started hosting virtual play groups and bedside visits. “HOP’s faces and energy have been incredibly missed in the hospital during this time, but we sincerely appreciate all your efforts to continue to connect,” said Kendra Frederick, manager, Child Life Program at UMass Memorial Medical Center. “We’ve been sharing your stories, crafts, games, cooking shows, etc. on our UMass Memorial Medical Center Facebook page as well as encouraging kids to watch from their hospital rooms! It’s a bright light in this (sometimes) dark time!”

Family Outreach also began offering weekly Caregiver Cabin Chats to give parents the opportunity to connect as they share their stories and struggles during these changing times.

Amid the development of all these new programs, Camp was also very much focused on its 33rd summer and how to make sure that the 1,300 campers who had applied to attend a weeklong session would still be able to have a memorable Hole in the Wall experience. In May, these families received a special invitation to join in the magic with three different experiences to choose from – weeklong summer sessions filled with an interactive array of live and pre-recorded virtual Camp content; a mailing series delivering content; a mailing series delivering weekly projects and culminating with the creation of special Camp keepsakes; and an exciting variety of special interest clubs allowing those with similar passions to learn new things while sharing the experience with kindred spirits. And for those families looking to get in on the action, our staff will be providing virtual home visits, bringing Camp magic right into their home for the “hole” family to enjoy.

Though this time has been challenging for all, everyone at Hole in the Wall remains grateful for the opportunity to continue bringing hope and healing to our children and families. And perhaps one silver lining from this period of programmatic pivoting is that many of these virtual and alternative offerings will very likely continue on and help to supplement in-person programming. “We have discovered that there is a real need for more of these Camp connections, and virtual platforms will provide us greater freedom, frequency and flexibility beyond COVID-19,” Hilary said. “We hope to continue offering caregiver cabin chats, home visits and other virtual activities well into the future.”
From the CEO

So far, 2020 has been unlike any year we’ve ever experienced. In February, we bid happy trails to a Hole in the Wall founding force when A.E. Hotchner passed away at age 102. Hotch, as he was affectionately known at Camp, was a co-conspirator with Paul in the founding of Newman’s Own and Hole in the Wall. He was also a longtime board member who played an important role in many of the initial movements that put The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp into motion and helped to creatively shape what became our signature fundraising event – the annual Fandango Benefit Gala.

And just one month later, we found ourselves in completely unchartered territory as we faced the COVID-19 pandemic. Though we had to suspend our in-person programming, our staff quickly stepped outside of their comfort zones and started developing new virtual programs to bring “a different kind of healing” in different ways to our children and families at a time when they needed us the most. The staff’s flexibility and creativity, as well as the support of our Camp community as a “hole,” have helped us make the sweetest lemonade possible from these sour pandemic lemons.

As I reflect on the challenges of the current times and look back on the leadership of both Paul and Hotch, I remain deeply grateful for the commitment to innovation that their entrepreneurial spirits instilled in us. We are all music makers and dreamers of dreams because they led the way by making the world a better place for our children and their families. It is an honor to follow in their footsteps alongside all of you as, together, we continue to bring the magic of Hole in the Wall to exciting new places.

What’s New at Camp

Over the past several months, so much has changed that it almost seems easier to ask – what hasn’t changed at Camp? That answer is simple. At Hole in the Wall, we will always be there for the children and families that we serve – no matter what.

In this spirit, Camp has not only put its “mission in motion” as noted in the cover story, but it also has been actively connecting with our volunteers and supporters. This past May, Hole in the Wall hosted Bandit Round Up - our annual day to say thank you to our donors – as a completely virtual event on Zoom.

Featuring live sessions with CEO Jimmy Canton and Chief Program Officer Hilary Axtmayer, special presentations from camper families and guest appearances from board members Lissy Newman and Bridget Maynahan, the day brought Camp friends even closer to our mission and allowed us to show our appreciation for all that they continue to do to support our children and families.

Additionally, volunteers were able to connect with each other during specially scheduled Cabin Chats and were also invited to take part in a series of Lunch & Learns where they could take a deeper dive into various Camp programs like Family Outreach, the Hero’s Journey® program and FUNraisers.

Speaking of FUNraisers, Camp also offered its first ever virtual walk, run, ride event this past spring called Newman’s Virtual Adventure. During the six-week challenge, participants got active with a purpose and “logged their Smiles” for Camp all while fundraising for our programs. Upon finishing, all participants received a special sheriff’s badge medal featuring Founder Paul Newman for following in his footsteps to bring “a different kind of healing” to seriously ill children and their families.

And even though Camp may be a little quieter than usual these days, we are very excited to hear the sounds of construction equipment as work is underway on our new Young Adult Lodge. Scheduled to be completed in early 2021, the 6,800-square-foot facility will serve as a new residential and programming hub for the Hero’s Journey® program, Leader in Training program and Young Adult Conference.

Camp’s Time Capsule

The Gazette has been a part of Camp communications since the very first summer. It may have grown from four pages to eight, but the healing impact of Camp has always remained front and center on its pages.
Matthew, Michael’s older brother, has spent so much time with Michael because of his diagnosis. For instance, Michael has become very excited about his older brother attending Family Camp and being surrounded by a caring community of support. Family Camp and being surrounded by such opportunities the family has found has been our Camp family. Hole in the Wall has been going live online with games, stories and activities. Taking part in these Camp activities and seeing familiar faces has put joy and a sense of connection back into our lives. After the initial shock of this “new normal,” our family has enjoyed this piece of virtual Camp from our home.

One week in particular, when life was very heavy on my shoulders, my daughter Danica and I saw that Camp was hosting “Relaxing Zendoodling with Rebecca.” Danica suggested that we set up outside, giving us the Camp feel. It was just what my heart and head needed. We put on our patio lights, set up the phone so we could see Rebecca live, and had our paper and colored pencils ready to go. I cannot express how wonderful it was to have that moment with my daughter and Camp. I can honestly say for that half hour I was no longer a mom quarantined with my family, carrying all the worries that brings. I was at Camp. My heart and head were fully there for that entire time, nowhere else. I also saw my daughter with that sparkle in her eye - the one she gets when she’s with Camp. That takes a lot right now, to be able to push aside the reality of life and how the world is at this moment.

We are so thankful for Camp giving us these moments to escape reality. Even when we’re confined to our own home, we feel we have a little piece of time at Hole in the Wall. It also helps bring back Camp memories, which make for great family flashbacks.

Some of our other virtual camp favorites have been making mug cakes with Frankie, interacting live with her and custom choosing our favorite flavors-yummy, and all the amazing Chef Dan recipes that Camp is sharing with us! Everyone who has been to Camp knows how amazing the Dining Hall and Camp food is! I’m not kidding when I tell you our family was over the moon excited when the “Camp Brownie Recipe” was posted! Yes, Danica made them right away and yes, our family of four ate the whole 9x13 pan in less than 24 hours! No joke! Tasting Camp brownies brought us right back into the Dining Hall with all the Camp love we feel when we are there.

Oh, how we miss Camp dearly, but oh how grateful we are that Camp is continuing to spread Camp magic to all of us despite the physical distance.

In Their Own Words
A reflection on Camp from Camper Mom Sherry

We all find ourselves living in a world with so many unknowns right now. Being quarantined to our homes, the kids being taught in a new way through e-learning and missing their peers and teachers, and not knowing when you’ll get to see family and friends in person again. Many of the joys and events we were all looking forward to were canceled in an instant. It takes a toll on our hearts and minds. A bright light for our hearts has been our Camp family. Hole in the Wall has been going live online with games, stories and activities. Taking part in these Camp activities and seeing familiar faces has put joy and a sense of connection back into our lives. After the initial shock of this “new normal,” our family has enjoyed this piece of virtual Camp from our home.

One week in particular, when life was very heavy on my shoulders, my daughter Danica and I saw that Camp was hosting “Relaxing Zendoodling with Rebecca.” Danica suggested that we set up outside, giving us the Camp feel. It was just what my heart and head needed. We put on our patio lights, set up the phone so we could see Rebecca live, and had our paper and colored pencils ready to go. I cannot express how wonderful it was to have that moment with my daughter and Camp. I can honestly say for that half hour I was no longer a mom quarantined with my family, carrying all the worries that brings. I was at Camp. My heart and head were fully there for that entire time, nowhere else. I also saw my daughter with that sparkle in her eye - the one she gets when she’s with Camp. That takes a lot right now, to be able to push aside the reality of life and how the world is at this moment.

We are so thankful for Camp giving us these moments to escape reality. Even when we’re confined to our own home, we feel we have a little piece of time at Hole in the Wall. It also helps bring back Camp memories, which make for great family flashbacks.

Some of our other virtual camp favorites have been making mug cakes with Frankie, interacting live with her and custom choosing our favorite flavors-yummy, and all the amazing Chef Dan recipes that Camp is sharing with us! Everyone who has been to Camp knows how amazing the Dining Hall and Camp food is! I’m not kidding when I tell you our family was over the moon excited when the “Camp Brownie Recipe” was posted! Yes, Danica made them right away and yes, our family of four ate the whole 9x13 pan in less than 24 hours! No joke! Tasting Camp brownies brought us right back into the Dining Hall with all the Camp love we feel when we are there.

Oh, how we miss Camp dearly, but oh how grateful we are that Camp is continuing to spread Camp magic to all of us despite the physical distance.

Family Flats
Stories from current and former camper families.

It would be very easy for Bill Smith to focus on the negative. His son, Michael, has short bowel syndrome and an acquired brain injury. He requires constant care, has a nurse in the house, and an acquired brain injury. He also has the opportunity to lift others up and help those who may be struggling. Though getting to the weekend wasn’t easy – he and his wife, Lisa, had to go separately to ensure Michael would have proper care – it speaks to the family’s commitment to seize all opportunities and not let Michael’s diagnosis keep them from new experiences.

The family also makes a point to regularly attend CampOut events, traveling from their home in New Hampshire to regional Campfires in Massachusetts. “Because of Michael’s memory challenges, it’s important to continually do things that reinforce his experiences,” Bill said. “CampOut keeps the Camp connection going for Michael and keeps him excited about Camp.”

And though the family wasn’t able to attend their planned Family Weekend this spring, they were grateful for the opportunity to participate in Family Weekends virtually. “The boys enjoyed the songs and being able to show their talents in any form that they are comfortable with,” Bill said. “And it gave us some respite as parents to have the boys so enthused with seeing familiar people from Camp.”

If you’d like to learn more about Camp’s programming - virtual and otherwise - please contact Hilary Axtmayer, chief program officer, at hilary.axtmayer@holeinthewallgang.org

Facebook Live sessions have brought so much joy and connection to the Bruening family during these uncertain times.

Some of our other virtual camp favorites have been making mug cakes with Frankie, interacting live with her and custom choosing our favorite flavors-yummy, and all the amazing Chef Dan recipes that Camp is sharing with us! Everyone who has been to Camp knows how amazing the Dining Hall and Camp food is! I’m not kidding when I tell you our family was over the moon excited when the “Camp Brownie Recipe” was posted! Yes, Danica made them right away and yes, our family of four ate the whole 9x13 pan in less than 24 hours! No joke! Tasting Camp brownies brought us right back into the Dining Hall with all the Camp love we feel when we are there.

Oh, how we miss Camp dearly, but oh how grateful we are that Camp is continuing to spread Camp magic to all of us despite the physical distance.

No one ever said you have to kiss your OWN fish at Camp. Michael thought it was more fun for his family pal, Michael Brogan, to give his fish a great big kiss.
Thank you to our 2019 Volunteers & FUNraisers!

We celebrate the thousands of volunteers, athletes and community-event organizers who helped make 2019 an outstanding year for Camp and our campers! Your impact is felt across the organization, and we are so grateful for all that you do!

---

“This was one of the most rewarding opportunities that I have been able to be a part of. I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to make a difference in someone’s life. I cannot wait to be able to come back again.”

– Hole in the Wall volunteer

---

“It’s all about the kids, so you can’t stop; you can’t quit. It’s been a journey that I hope I can keep doing. It’s made me such a better person and makes me feel like I’ve made a difference in the world.”

– Daisy Kosack, FUNraiser

---

TOTAL RAISED: $3,243,256

103  Community Events

477  Athletic FUNraisers

711  Family Weekend Volunteers

462  Family Outreach Volunteers

1,076  Helping Hands Workday Volunteers

523  Summer Program Volunteers

481  Development Volunteers

253  Medical Volunteers

563  Hospital Outreach Volunteers

307  Administrative Volunteers

115  Parent Volunteers

---

Thank you to our 2019 Volunteers & FUNraisers!
2019 Weekend Programs were so much **FUN**

As with all other Hole in the Wall programming, Weekend Programs extend the hope and healing of Camp to the entire family, as well as those who have aged out of our traditional programs. These weekends offer friendship, support and "a different kind of healing" to those most isolated and in need of Camp magic.
Our Events
Highlights of our latest benefit events and those to come…

For more than a quarter century, the Big Apple Bash and Beantown Bash have been raising significant funds to support the seriously ill children and families Camp serves, and in 2019, the two events brought in a combined $3.5 million! Championed by four longstanding friends of Camp, the two Bashes find their successes in a unique formula built upon community. In New York, Stefani LiDestri and Peter Schottland, along with their families and family companies – LiDestri Food and Drink and American Packaging Corporation – have joined forces to rally business associates, vendors and others in their network to support Camp at the Big Apple Bash, where attendees are treated to a private performance of the Big Apple Circus followed by a celebration at the iconic Tavern on the Green. Similarly, in Boston, Andy Crowley and his family along with their company Ken’s Foods and event co-chair Billy Cotter inspire Camp support from

Sheriff’s Spotlight
A shout-out to our dedicated corporate partners.

Jersey Mike’s Subs is a company with a mission – and that mission is all about giving back. You may know them best as a sub shop, but from the very beginning, Jersey Mike’s Subs has been committed to supporting the communities that support them. Nowhere is this more apparent than during their Month of Giving, which is held every March. Started in 2011, Jersey Mike’s Subs’ Month of Giving invites customers, employees and others to make a donation to a charity selected by the franchisee. It culminates with a Day of Giving held on the last Wednesday of the month, where each store donates all sales to the selected charity.

“It all stems from our founder, Peter Cancro, who is maniacal about giving back,” said Sean Sullivan, owner of four Jersey Mike’s Subs stores in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

“We have a great relationship with the other stores,” Sean said. “We talk a lot, especially about the Day of Giving. I mentioned Camp, and with the great work you do and how easy you are to work with, it wasn’t hard at all to get them on board too.”

If you’d like to learn more about Camp’s corporate partner program, contact Andrea Keefe, director, community and corporate partnerships, at andrea.keefe@holeinthewallgang.org or (203) 772-0522.
For years, actress Mary Elizabeth Ellis and her husband, actor Charlie Day, have been staunch supporters of Hole in the Wall, even stopping by for a visit a couple of years ago. The duo is well-known for their comic creativity, with Charlie being a writer and executive producer of the popular show “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia,” and both he and Mary Elizabeth being part of the cast.

The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp is a community dedicated to providing a “different kind of healing” to seriously ill children and their families through a variety of programs. The Camp delivers fun, and weekend sessions at the Camp facility in Ashford, Conn. as well as outreach to hospitals, clinics and communities across the Northeast. All services are free of charge. In keeping with Camp’s core value of Camaraderie, Hole in the Wall fosters a community of purposeful inclusion through a commitment to diversity and equality.

“We are so grateful to the cast of ‘It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia’ and everyone at Omaze for the incredible efforts that made this campaign such an unbelievable success,” said Ryan Thompson, Hole in the Wall’s chief development and communications officer. “Because of their tremendous passion and partnership as well as the amazing friendship of Charlie Day and Mary Elizabeth Ellis, we can now say – with very full hearts and without hesitation – that it’s always sunny at Hole in the Wall.”

In addition to providing counsel on Camp fundraising strategies and messaging, Wild Bunch members are also giving generously themselves to fund key programmatic initiatives and engaging their personal networks to support Hole in the Wall. In fact, the Wild Bunch and its network have already provided $725,000 in new funding since the initiative launched in September 2019.

“Camp is blessed to have this caring community of friends who have shared their commitment to carrying the torch our founder left behind,” said Jimmy. “We are so grateful for their gifts of time, ideas, compassion and financial support.”

If you’d like to learn more about the Wild Bunch, please contact Christopher Pates, senior director of development, at christopher.pates@ holeinthewallgang.org.
We all can’t wait to get back to the place we love so much. But in the meantime, Hole in the Wall is providing “a different kind of healing” in different ways to ensure our children and families find joy, hope and some Camp magic when they need it the most.

Look inside to see how Hole in the Wall is providing “a different kind of healing” in different ways.