



The adventure continues for SUMMER FUN participants!




If you were to ask Summer Fun Coordinators Jordyn Oleksyn and Taylor Block what they love most about their jobs they would tell you that they get to spend their days with amazing participants and a dedicated group of volunteers doing fun and unique activities throughout the community. Summer Fun is a program for children and youth aged 6 to 22 who experience disability. The program helps minimize barriers such as accessibility and transportation so individuals of all abilities can participate in planned activities throughout the city.

The program also provides children and youth with opportunities to see more of the community, make friends, learn new skills, increase their independence and develop a sense of belonging through shared activities. Each group attends activities tailored to their interests

and ability. City of Saskatoon Program Leader Michael Spehar is one of many community members who enjoyed a visit from the program at the Briarwood Spray Park. He said, "As a local who took advantage of this very program as a child, the opportunity to give back to the city and community is one which I cherish, especially when our programs provide an opportunity for our visiting groups to enjoy a quality, fun summer."

Dutch Growers Workshop Instructor Elyn Achtymichuk-Hardy enjoys the opportunity to teach groups of all ages and abilities about the joy of gardening. Following a workshop with the Summer Fun Program she said, "Today we took plants and soil and pots and created something wonderful. When we create a garden, it brings everyone together." It was evident that the group both created

something wonderful and learned many new things about plant life.

Jordyn and Taylor know the importance of trying to view the world through the eyes of someone experiencing disability. Jordyn said, "Being part of a program that supports youth in accessing recreation like that of their peers has been extremely rewarding and eye-opening." Taylor added, "Our participants allow us to see how inaccessible our world can be, but also how much it is changing for the better. Our appreciation has grown for our community as we have seen the changes and been welcomed into conversation that has made Saskatoon more inclusive." 



– CELEBRATING 65 YEARS! –

Life at Camp Easter Seal

**By Elaine Kaloustian,
Communications Coordinator**

We often hear the words “life changing” associated with Camp Easter Seal. How many of us who have never been to Camp Easter Seal really understand the depth of those words? As a SaskAbilities staff member who often interviews campers, and with Camp Easter Seal Celebrating its 65th Anniversary this year, I wanted to find out why they tell me this so often, so I spent time at two Camp Easter Seal sessions to see what I could learn.

The camp day starts with an early breakfast at the dining hall. Mealtime is buzzing with excitement as campers and counsellors joke with each other, sing crazy camp songs, play music, or simply reflect on their time away from home. Everyone is so welcoming, making it easy to join in on conversations. The scenery is beautiful with historic stone structures and modernized decks that overlook Little Manitou Lake. It was so easy to pull a chair up to a table and become part of the conversations around me.

I had an opportunity to speak with a group of camp coordinators before exploring what camp had to offer. This is where the word “life changing” started to take on a new meaning for me, because I thought camp only changed the lives of campers. I was wrong. I heard stories about how many counsellors returned year after year to be at camp, and how many people created life-long friendships simply because, just like the campers, something

about that place just feels right.

When Ben first started working at Camp Easter Seal, he was a post-secondary student studying business, attending camp between school sessions. This is now his third year at camp and he said it has changed his life, “Camp has pushed me to work harder than I could have ever pushed myself on my own. When you create special moments with campers it’s really motivating to make the most of every day.” Because of the effect Camp Easter Seal had on him, Ben decided to take a completely new direction in life and is now a second-year nursing student.

As I spoke to more counsellors, I learned that many of them have career paths supporting health and wellness of community members. There couldn’t be a better place than Camp Easter Seal to learn first-hand how we teach each other to find joy in life.

After learning about how the counsellors felt, it was time to learn more about the campers. As I wandered through the camp I took in the beautiful scenery around me; the beach, the dock with a beautiful boat, the fully accessible swimming pool that borders the beach area, an amazing playground and finally the recreation and crafts areas.

Both of my visits to camp taught me how valuable each part of camp is to campers. The recreation area was filled with campers, ready to enjoy a horse ride. And for those who were not riding that day, a visit with the friendliest horse I’ve ever seen was on the agenda. Something I noted was the constant buzz of joking, laughter, music, and even quiet meaningful conversation between counsellors and campers. This camp truly is a place where a “can-do” attitude comes first.

The recreation building was busy that day. Counsellors who were very good at rethinking how a sport is

played made the games completely accessible. Bowling is a great example. Every camper in the recreation centre was able to participate! Many other sports took place that day, like Foosball, floor hockey, basketball and playing musical instruments, to name a few. Every camper was busy doing something they chose to do. Every counsellor was friendly, attentive, and having just as much fun.

Elizabeth is another long-time counsellor at Camp Easter Seal. She first became acquainted with camp as a camper when she was 14 years old. She said, “When I arrived at camp, I can remember not getting any looks of pity, like I was used to, but instead I received looks of acceptance. All my fears about camp and being away from home disappeared within the first day. I made so many new friends. The camp staff and campers were wonderful and for the first time in my life I felt like I belonged somewhere.” When presented with the opportunity to work at camp, Elizabeth said she jumped at the chance. Elizabeth’s specialty is the arts and crafts area where she is always dreaming up unique projects that campers love to create. The craft area was filled with projects ready to go home. The walls were covered with murals drawn on the doors by campers, serving as a memory of time spent at camp. She said, “I always try to plan things according to the campers that are here by considering what they are interested in.”

After a fun-filled day of activity, everyone at camp was treated to a fantastic meal.

I was fortunate enough that one of my visits was on banquet day. A very generous donation resulted in a delicious turkey dinner with all the trimmings. As good as that was, what really piqued my interest was the comradery, the humour, and the true joy that everyone felt. It was so noisy there! Counsellors led campers in songs filled with clapping and percussion created with anything that was available.

On this night, multiple campers gave speeches, each outlining what camp and the people there meant to them and how it changed their lives. It was truly a touching moment, and a moment that I saw how important my job of sharing stories is.

I think my biggest takeaway after spending time at camp is that I learned there is more than one way to get something done and the creativity that flows at camp is truly amazing! I wish I could have stayed longer and I’m beginning to understand why so many campers and counsellors tell me the stories they do. As a person who is lucky enough to be able to share stories, I feel truly blessed. It’s so easy to be at Camp Easter Seal. It’s so enlightening, relaxing, educational, and yes, life changing. 🌱



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Participants learn about farm life through experience

There is always something exciting happening at SaskAbilities, and Regina summer programs are no exception. This year the SLYP-Out (Social Leisure Youth Program) and Summer Fun programs joined forces to enjoy their very first out-of-town activity at Fenek Farms.

Located outside of Regina, the farm includes a petting zoo where you can say hello to geese, sheep, chickens and alpaca to name a few. Visitors to the farm not only learn about farm life, they also participate in activities, learn about sustainability and the environment, and the importance of stewardship.



Miranda Hoiland, Summer Fun Facilitator, said, "Fenek Farms offers youth the opportunity to venture outside the typical hustle of the city and get a glimpse of life on the farm where participants can enjoy the beautiful weather and various animals. The outing was one to remember, with a new surprise at the farm-honey bees!"

Participants learned how bees are good for our environment and how to properly handle them so they do not sting. Everyone was offered a sample of fresh honey straight from the honeycomb.

Among the many animals at the farm were baby chicks and rabbits that everyone could hold. Participants were also right on time to feed the sheep and alpaca. So many questions were asked, and a great time was had by all.

Maria Buttigieg, owner/operator of Fenek Farms, said, "I think this program is good for kids who live in the city because they learn where their food comes from, and it provides an education that you can't get from electronics." Maria has practiced this philosophy with her own family and is happy to share it with others.

Regina SLYP-Out and Summer Fun programs offer children and youth who experience disability the opportunity to participate in programming that is inclusive and dynamic. This trip was no exception. Thank you Fenek Farms for a great day! 