

Growing in Confidence at Camp Easter Seal



On July 19, 2023 the grounds of Camp Easter Seal were filled with many visitors and supporters, all in celebration of Camp Day 2023. The festivities kicked off with welcoming words and speeches from staff, notable guests, and government representatives, followed by a special interview between Camp Manager Steve Grove, and camper Raoul Proulx. With much confidence, the youth camper spoke from the heart about his experiences and what Camp means to him.

“Camp means I am away from my younger siblings for a week! It gives me space. Camp is very accessible – I can go anywhere! Camp means a lot of different kinds of activities, and I love the weekly themes. Camp has a lot of spirit!”

Having attended Camp Easter Seal since he was six years old, Raoul has a catalogue of memories to draw from, including an especially fun time “helping” support workers enjoy not one but two unexpected swims off the side of the pontoon boat! Now 14 years old, Raoul has a pretty good grasp of what to expect from his week-long stay each summer, and according to him, “it never gets boring,” including the meals. “The food is excellent. There is not a single bad meal! Camp food is even better than the meals I get at home,” says Raoul with a smile, clearly looking for a reaction from his mom. “I knew you were going to say that,” laughs Brenda, shaking her head at her grinning son. “They make the best pulled

pork ever, and I found the best combination – vegetables dipped in chipotle sauce!”

Since 1954, Camp Easter Seal has been providing a safe and inclusive place where campers can play, explore, grow, and experience a level of independence not always had in their everyday lives. Hundreds of children, youth, and adults experiencing disability retreat each summer to Little Manitou Lake to experience a life-changing week that is truly magical. We invite you to share in our continued mission to ensure no one is left behind in experiencing the safe and supportive environment Camp provides where, truly, everyone belongs.

Diagnosed with Arthrogryposis at birth, Raoul has never let that slow him down or prevent him from doing things he’s determined to do. “He didn’t have his first wheelchair until a month before he started kindergarten, but that didn’t slow him down at home. I think it was actually great for him because it instilled in him this independence and growing up not thinking he’s only dependent on his wheelchair,” explains Brenda, also noting her son may have a bit of a stubborn streak thanks to her.

Despite Raoul’s determination, accessibility outside of Camp has not always been easy in his everyday life, including activities in gym class, playing baseball outside, going to a park with sand, and tent camping with friends and family. Raoul’s response in those moments was never to get down on himself or feel depressed. Instead, he focuses on all the things he’s really great at, like math, reading, writing, video games, chess, and perfecting his public speaking skills. “I like to talk. A LOT. I like to talk a lot,” insists Raoul, enthusiastically speaking during his Camp Day interview. “I’m also not afraid to talk to people, to strangers. I may be in a wheelchair, but I stand up for myself.”

From Raoul’s first drop off at Camp to the latest one, Brenda has seen a significant change in her son, aside from the typical teen antics and lack of hugs goodbye! “The first summer we dropped





The staff make us feel like we belong and help us find our own good stuff."

RAOUL



him off, we had a phone call from Raoul – he wanted to come home. It broke my heart, but we talked about how he was going to make a bunch of new friends and how much fun he was going to have. He did stay. Now, he can't wait to get out of the vehicle when we pull up. Camp has given Raoul more independence away from me. It's made him realize he can do things without having his family right there, which has also given him this boost in confidence that he carries with him outside of Camp into his everyday life and activities," shares Brenda, who is quick to mention she does her best to steal a hug from Raoul before he rushes off for his week-long adventure at Camp!

While Raoul's confidence finds him making friends at Camp quite easily, it has also found him bonding and connecting with staff members. "Going to Camp now, I hear the stories, but many of the stories he shares are about the support workers and leaders. But that's Raoul. He tends to gravitate towards an older crowd, and I think that's probably where his maturity is – he's a teenager but connects more with young adults than maybe some of the peers his age," shares Brenda of her son.

Raoul's growing confidence, maturity, and love of Camp made him an obvious choice to share his experiences with visitors during Camp Day. "Steve and a support worker asked if I wanted to do the interview for Camp Day. They asked me the questions

beforehand, and the answers just came to me - I didn't have to think about it," insists Raoul, who infused a lot of personality and a pinch of humour into his interview with Camp Manager Steve Groves. With zero nerves peeking through, Raoul enchanted listeners with a glimpse into his world and why Camp Easter Seal is so important to him with the ease and authenticity of a seasoned public speaker. Exiting with a big round of applause behind him, the smile on Raoul's face mirrored the many smiles in the crowd.

Camp season is just around the corner, and we know hundreds of campers across Saskatchewan are counting down the days until their return to Camp Easter Seal at Little Manitou Lake. For individuals like Raoul, Camp is an opportunity to exert independence, make meaningful connections, learn about oneself, and, of course, eat the best camp food ever! Together, with your support, we can give the gift of Camp to Raoul and the many children, youth, and adults experiencing disability across the province. Please donate today!

Sincerely,

Ian Wilkinson,
Executive Director

To help keep our fully-accessible camps affordable for families, EASTER SEALS™ SASKATCHEWAN subsidizes camp costs. Your financial donations are what makes this possible.

