

Through HCF Grants

The Summer Camp Experience – for All Children

In 1984, Hamilton Community Foundation entered a partnership with *The Hamilton Spectator* to make it possible for disadvantaged Hamilton children to go to summer camp. In the more than 20 years since, thousands of kids from low-income families have benefited from the camp experience.

The Hamilton Spectator Summer Camp Fund, promoted by the newspaper, receives donations from generous Hamiltonians who want to help send a kid to camp. Hamilton Community Foundation works with local charities that offer summer programming for children – like Big Brothers/Big Sisters, local Children's Aid Societies, theatre groups, colleges, Y's, the City of Hamilton Culture and Recreation Department and many other organizations. The organizations apply to the foundation for funds to make their programs available to more children in financial need, including those with special needs (e.g. physical disabilities, fragile health, language barriers). Each year, a committee, made up of representatives from Hamilton Community Foundation and *The Hamilton Spectator*, reviews the grant applications and decides which organizations will receive grants from The Hamilton Spectator Summer Camp Fund. In 2007, for example, 21 organizations received a total of \$106,340. The grants made it possible for more than 1,000 children to attend one week of day camp and 78 children to attend week-long residential camps.

For many Canadian children and adults, summer camp is a defining memory. We remember learning skills like art, swimming, or paddling and we remember friendships that seemed extra special because of the setting. The adults around us probably noticed changes after camp: increasing confidence, a growing maturity, excitement born from the discovery of new things. Research confirms our intuitive understanding that camp is crucial to skills development, self-esteem, socialization, inspiration – and fun.

How HCF is Helping

- *HCF donors have been supporting summer camp for children for decades. The Spectator began its commitment to camp as early as the 1920s. Since 1984, The Hamilton Spectator Summer Camp Fund has formalized and promoted that commitment to children's recreation opportunities.*
- *Donors of all means support the Hamilton Spectator Summer Camp Fund, some with regular annual donations, and some with permanent endowment gifts that ensure the future of the Fund. Each year, the number of children who would benefit from an affordable camp experience grows.*

The Power of Recreation and Skills Development

- Research shows that structured arts and recreation programs help children and youth develop essential skills for success in school and work: like self-esteem, creativity, problem-solving, and communication.
- Investing in youth recreation pays dividends in cost savings for youth at risk and their families. (Dr. Gina Browne, McMaster child development expert)
- The financial cost of many local sport and recreation programs is prohibitive for low-income families; transportation is sometimes a barrier and children from diverse backgrounds can also encounter cultural barriers.

The experiences of the kids who attend camps are as varied as the children themselves: some learn sports, some arts and crafts, some performance skills, still others science and technology. Children with disabilities learn to ride horses, children with emotional difficulties express themselves through drama, kids interested in science learn about reptiles or how to build an electrical circuit. Some have outings to a fire station, the Marine Discovery Centre, a zoo, and working farms. For inner-city children with limited resources, these experiences are all new and expand their horizons.

For many Hamilton families, the cost of summer camp is prohibitive. The Hamilton Spectator Summer Camp Fund removes that barrier. In the last ten years, more than 9,300 children have gone to summer camp thanks to the Fund.

Who Wins with The Hamilton Spectator Summer Camp Fund

Some examples cited by camp counsellors:

- *"Niall, a 12-year-old, who was born completely blind, had never been to a horse camp before. He worried that because he was blind, he would not be able to participate in activities. But he learned to tack, groom and bathe a horse and even rode off-lead. He also enjoyed the water games and tactile craft activities. During our weekly horse show put on for parents, Niall's mother watched as he trotted by, smiling the whole time. With tears in her eyes, she told me she had not seen him smile in years."*
- *"One child we were able to provide sponsorship to this summer has a father who is unable to work after having suffered a stroke. Another child, who had never attended camp before, has a mother who is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. So sometimes when you give us the means to help a child, we are helping the rest of the family at the same time."*
- *"Camps provide all youth with new opportunities to meet and interact with campers and staff outside their catchment area for school. For example, Mini-University provides campers with the opportunity to explore learning in a hands-on way...that they normally wouldn't be able to do at a school level (i.e. doing dissections or making a silver mirror on glass), in addition to meeting fabulous university students, who quickly become their role models."*