

Welcome...

Welcome to Camp's Fall 2020 Newsletter!

September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month (CCAM), which makes this the perfect time to share with you all of the wonderful stories enclosed in this newsletter. Interested in helping us **#GOGOLD** this month? Then be sure to visit our CCAM website at <http://bit.ly/gogold4camp> Here, you'll learn how you can support our efforts to raise awareness about childhood cancer.



THIS PAST WINTER, T.A.C. TOOK ON JOSHUA TREE AND W.O.L.P. BECAME STRANGER W.O.L.P.!

Over the first weekend in January, we took our Teen Advisory Committee (TAC) on the second-ever Teen Advisory Committee Overnight or "T.A.C.O" trip thanks to support from the Kevin Cordasco Foundation: Something Yellow.

Camp's Teen Advisory Committee youth steer leadership development opportunities for our teen campers year-round. This 2020 trip was a camping experience in Joshua Tree National Park and included sleeping out under the stars, hiking and visiting sites all over the park, and time set aside for planning and connecting. During this trip, our T.A.C. youth took the lead on setting up Camp, planning out the itinerary, and looking out for each other as individuals and as a group. Our teens also developed their plan for leading Camp's Wilderness Outdoor Leadership Program (W.O.L.P.) Walk for Kids team, which this year raised a record-breaking \$16,447!



Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend 2020 saw 122 campers and 64 volunteers and staff attend the Wilderness Outdoor Leadership Program's (W.O.L.P.'s) much-anticipated winter session.

The theme for this year was "Stranger W.O.L.P." – a homage to the hit series "Stranger Things." Our amazing staff and volunteers gave all of the weekend's activities a 1980s spin, with the central message that it's good to be "strange," unique, and authentically oneself.

The weekend's fun courses and activities included film & podcast creation, cooperative games, a basic first aid class, designing and creating comic book type art, cooking class, STEM science lab experiments, and photojournalism basics.



CAMP IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS...

There were also two big, all-camp events - the "Snow Ball" Dance, which included a 1980s dress code, and a "Night at the Star Court Mall!" The idea behind the latter was to re-create the typical 1980s shopping mall hangout environment for our campers so they could experience what it was like back then to hang out with friends, sans mobile phones. Our campers had the option that night to go anywhere in the "mall" they wished, which included an information booth, a movie theater showing 1980s films, a food court and soda fountain, a karaoke lounge, an arcade, a "glamour shots" studio, a games corner, and a 1980s-themed escape room!

Here's what one of our campers had to say about the weekend:

"How blessed I am to have a place that makes saying goodbye so hard. Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times, thank you for the best 15 years of my life. The best years, the best memories, the best friends. Thank you for being my safety and my therapy through a lifetime of watching my brother struggle with the burden that is cancer and chemotherapy and their everlasting side effects. Thank you for providing me with the community of people that I can call my family and this place that I can call my home. I could never thank you all enough times." -Monet

For a moment, it was just heartbreaking – the realization that it would not be safe to hold the spring Family Camp sessions at Camp's beautiful site in Mountain Center. How could it be, when so many of our kids are immunocompromised, and the virus continues to be a mystery that must be decoded? Such was the decision made by Camp's Medical Advisory Committee and leadership. No virus can keep Camp down, however, so our ingenious and passionate program staff and volunteers got to work. The result of their efforts was Camp at Home, a new, virtual programming model that launched in the spring and became even more comprehensive and amazing this summer.

For the Spring Family Camps for families with cancer-impacted children ages 0-8, we offered more than 50 counselor-led activities that were posted on our Family Camp at Home website (<http://bit.ly/virtualfamilycamp>), along with a parent's guide on how to make it work! The Spring Camps were well received by families, with more than 1,000 views of the video activities!

And this summer, we launched Summer Camp at Home. We are happy to report that more than 330 campers ages 9 to high school graduation registered for this landmark approach to summer camp, which was composed of two parts: "Camp in the Box" and Camp Online.



Our "Camp in the Box" kits were filled with that coveted Camp swag (of course), as well as all of the supplies campers needed to participate in online activities. Two of our W.O.L.P. teens, sisters Gracie and India Eastridge, generously brought their talents to the "Camp in a Box" kits that helped make this summer so fun: with the help of TAC, Gracie designed the artwork displayed on our special addition Camp at Home T-shirt while India constructed the kits' "gopher's eye" charms!

Campers signed up for activities with campers their own age, as well as group activities for all. And with activities running from 11am to 5pm Monday through Friday, our kids enjoyed days that were FILLED with that Camp magic. For a glimpse of the fun and fellowship our kids enjoyed this summer, check out this video by counselor "Gummy": <http://bit.ly/CRMFGTsummer2020>.

Camper Aaron Paulson, age 17 summed this summer up so well when he shared, *"The magic and fun that comes with every single online activity at Camp is one of the best experiences I've had this entire summer of quarantine. So thank you all - I love you!"*

According to Camper mom Irene Piedra, Camp at Home brought joy into the lives of her kids. She stated, *"I love camp from home! It honestly has given our three children at home sooo much to look forward to! They signed up for something at least once every day of the week! It's so refreshing to see them interacting and just so positive about their zoom meetings & chats with the different counselors. I love how ecstatic and just happy they are when they go over their meetings with me and they tell me all about what they learned, who joined or how funny it was. So thank you! God bless you all for every single joy you guys bring to our lives!"*

In addition to continuing to provide Camp in a Box and Camp at Home this fall for Family Camp, another bright spot is that Camp at Home will live on, even after we can once again begin meeting "up the mountain." We will ultimately bring Camp at Home into the hospital setting and to campers who are homebound and too ill to attend Camp. Now THAT will be something to celebrate!





CHILDHOOD CANCER'S SILVER LINING

For the Curiel Family, Oncologist and Longtime Volunteer Dr. Stephen "Stretch" Speicher was Their Guide to Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times... and a New Way to Heal

Can a childhood leukemia diagnosis have a silver lining? The Curiel family will tell you that the answer to that question is "yes." 7 year-old Pedro Curiel's journey exemplifies the connection that exists between the body, heart, and spirit, and it began with meeting Dr. Stephen "Stretch" Speicher – his medical oncologist and a longtime volunteer at Camp.

Pedro was diagnosed on January 22nd in 2018, just one month after his fifth birthday, Dr. Speicher broke the news to Vilma, who says she knew immediately what that meant because Pedro's Uncle had died from leukemia.

Dr. Speicher states that his first meeting with Pedro is one of his most impactful memories as a doctor. He shares, "I have a vivid memory of Pedro and his two brothers, walking around the ER pretending to be a train. It was such a beautiful site. As an oncologist, it is so difficult knowing the news you're about to deliver and seeing them so happy...knowing you're about to change their lives forever."

Once he felt it was safe for Pedro to attend, Dr. Speicher also told the Curiels about Camp. As both a medical doctor and someone who's served as a counselor up at Camp, Dr. Speicher (or "Stretch," as he's known up the hill) has a unique perspective on how instrumental Camp is to the healing process for children and their families. He states, "We are able to provide an environment that is conducive to emotional healing. Families are also cared for medically. They wouldn't be able to immerse themselves if we didn't have a medically safe environment for kids because they'd feel worried or nervous."

Sure enough, like many parents hearing about Camp for the first time, Vilma had concerns. She shared that she was worried about Pedro's safety there, but Dr. Speicher explained to her that there would be a doctor and nurses on-site to provide any medical support he might need.

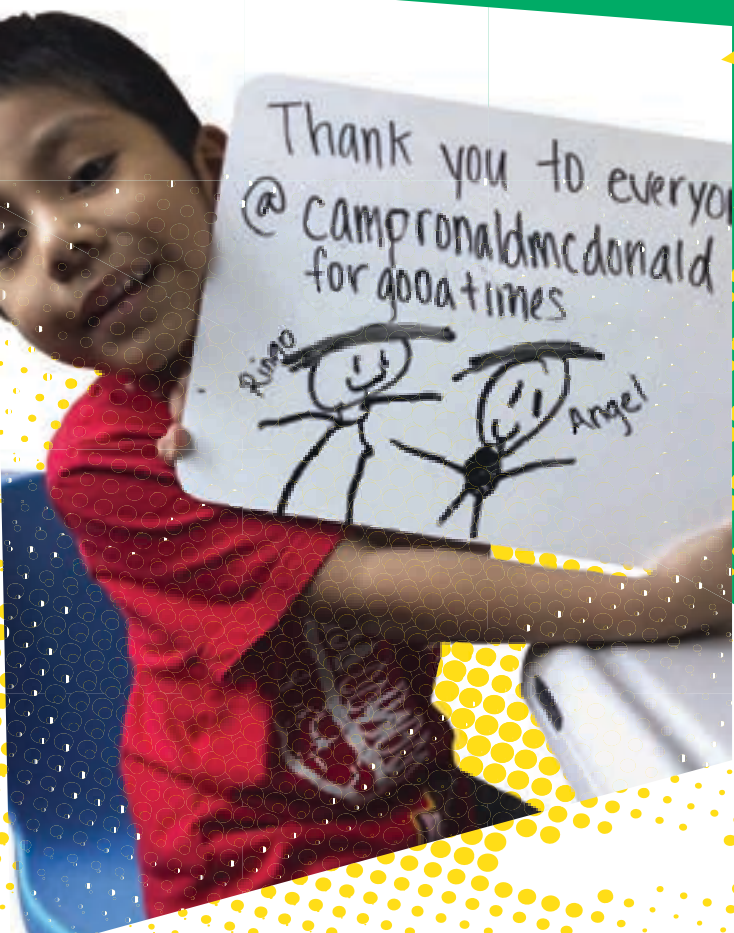
After easing Vilma's concerns, the Curiels attended a weekend-long Family Camp for the first time in October 2019. Of this first visit to Camp, Vilma shares, "The boys were very happy. Everything was so amazing. I felt like I was able to be present and enjoy. There was no service on my phone. You're off of social media and disconnected from the day-to-day stresses of life. We're so fortunate to be able to attend Camp. It's a breather for everyone."



Vilma also shares that her boys loved their counselor “Ringo,” and even expressed missing him once they returned home. She also says that attending her first parent meeting was eye-opening. Before the meeting, she was very concerned that Pedro would have separation anxiety. But Ringo and his fellow counselors kept Pedro calm so she could attend. Thanks to that meeting, Vilma came to understand that she is not alone in her experience of having a child with cancer, and that she is surrounded by a community that is ready to support her.

Vilma says that although other organizations reached out to help Pedro after his diagnosis, none of them offered any supports for his brothers. Camp is unique, she says, because the whole family is included in the Camp experience.

As of today, Pedro has been in remission for one year and will complete his course of treatment 18 months from now. Dr. Speicher shares that every time he sees him, Pedro eagerly talks about Camp and how he can't wait to return. Mom Vilma affirms, “October was our first time going to Camp, but I'm really looking forward to going again and watching my boys grow up in this beautiful community.”



CIRCLE OF HEALING SPOTLIGHT: IRIS AMANO

For Iris Amano, Director of Marketing & Multimedia at Barco Uniforms, the journey to Camp's Circle of Healing Monthly Giving Program was a deeply personal one.

According to Iris, it all started when her boss Michael Donner (Chairman of Barco Uniforms) introduced her to Aileen, the daughter of one of her coworkers. Aileen had loved attending Camp for many years, and her enthusiasm in describing Camp to Iris was infectious. This inspired Iris to learn more about Camp, which Barco's Nightingales Foundation supported.

Iris recalls that at the first Camp gala she attended, a young man spoke to the crowd and shared that in spite of having a difficult life, the promise of being up at Camp for one week every year helped him maintain his will to live. And when Iris made her first visit to Camp, she was incredibly moved by the “train of hands” that greeted her and her colleagues as they walked into the dining room for lunch. Iris states, “That day, several kids spontaneously introduced themselves and spoke with us. Their exuberance and happiness made me see how important Camp was for them. It made me want to do more.”

For years now, Iris has coordinated Barco's participation in the annual Walk for Kids. As for why she chooses to give monthly, she points out that by doing so, she feels like Camp is with her every day. She also values helping to ensure that Camp has a stable and reliable funding stream. “I have to say,” Iris concludes, “that as a Circle of Healing member, I feel like I'm part of this amazing and caring family. You just have to hear the kids sing at Campfire, as I have so many times, ‘Don't stop believin', hold on to that feeling.’ So I would say to anyone who is thinking of joining the Circle of Healing...help them keep believing.”

To join Camp's Circle of Healing, visit <http://bit.ly/CircleofHealing>.

YOUR LEGACY AND CAMP



The Fred & Fran Hill Legacy Society is a group of people who are committed to preserving the purpose, values and traditions of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern California (RMHCSC) for years to come. Fred & Fran Hill Legacy Society members have included RMHCSC in their long range estate plans or made a planned gift to the legacy fund during their lifetime and plan their gifts to generate future funds to RMHCSC. Contributions to the Legacy Fund creates an everlasting legacy to future generations.

You are invited to become members of the Fred & Fran Hill Legacy Society. If you would like more information, please contact Development Director Marlene Stang at mstang@rmhcsc.org.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

Dearest Friends of Camp,

These are unprecedented times. But in the face of the current pandemic, we are so very proud of how Camp has pivoted to support our campers at home when they need us most. Through our e-communications and in this newsletter, we've shared some of the incredible feedback we've received from campers and their parents about the impact of our new Camp at Home programming.

And it must be said – we've only been able to pivot so effectively because of our volunteers and donors like you.

It was extremely rewarding to hear all the positive feedback from our campers during this summer's Closing Campfire. For some, we learned, it was the absolute highlight of their summer, which means the world to us! Know that we will continue to adapt our programming as we receive feedback. We will always do this, and the reason is simple – meeting the needs of campers and their families is our very reason for existing!

We'd like to take this moment to thank all of the volunteer counselors and staff who went above and beyond during this very unique time to continue to bring joy to our amazing kiddos and families. As was mentioned at the Closing Campfire, "We're not just a camp, but a community that is always here."

Last, and certainly not least, thank YOU, our incredible supporters, for believing in our campers and being part of our life-changing impact.

With gratitude,
Fatima Djelmane Rodriguez
Executive Director

Scott Cohen
Board of Trustees Chair