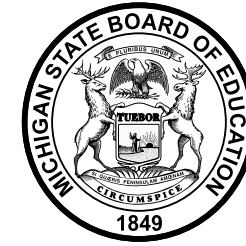




2023 Annual Report
Camp Tuhsmeheta

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Ex-Officio

Gretchen Whitmer, Governor
Dr. Michael F. Rice, State Superintendent

Camp Tuhsmeheeta would like to thank State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice and State Board of Education members for their continued support. Special acknowledgment and gratitude are extended to former Deputy Superintendent Dr. Scott Koenigs knecht, State Board of Education Member/Trustee Nikki Snyder, and Office of Financial Management Director Spencer Simmons.



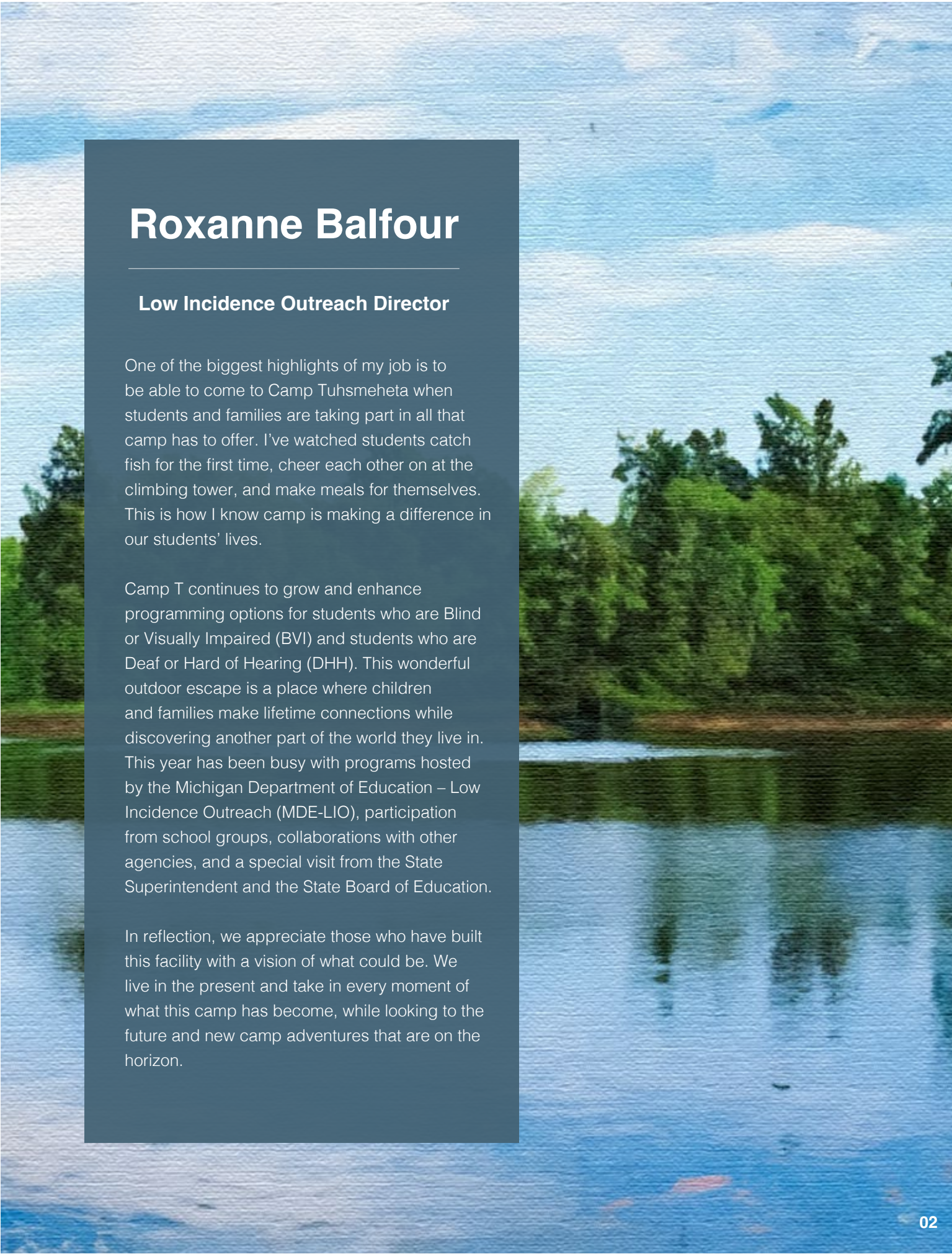
Jill Teegardin

Camp Tuhsmeheeta Director

Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) provides a transformative experience for students who are Blind/Visually Impaired (BVI) or Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH). It offers an inclusive community, promotes skill development, encourages independence and self-advocacy, and fosters personal growth. Through Camp T's immersive and supportive environment, students gain lifelong memories, develop important life skills, and build the confidence needed to succeed in various aspects of their lives.

This year, we have been able to connect with more intermediate school districts who brought their students to camp or are planning to do so in the fall. We've worked on collaborative projects that helped engage campers and expose them to a variety of real-world experiences. We began building a nature center, which will give campers a space to explore science and nature through more hands-on lessons.

Looking back on the past year, we find stories etched in every step, memories interwoven with joy and triumph. As we look forward to next year and celebrating Camp T's 50th anniversary, our hearts are filled with hope and anticipation. At Camp T, we believe in the power of dreams and our capacity to shape a world that reflects our shared aspirations and values.



Roxanne Balfour

Low Incidence Outreach Director

One of the biggest highlights of my job is to be able to come to Camp Tuhsmeheeta when students and families are taking part in all that camp has to offer. I've watched students catch fish for the first time, cheer each other on at the climbing tower, and make meals for themselves. This is how I know camp is making a difference in our students' lives.

Camp T continues to grow and enhance programming options for students who are Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI) and students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH). This wonderful outdoor escape is a place where children and families make lifetime connections while discovering another part of the world they live in. This year has been busy with programs hosted by the Michigan Department of Education – Low Incidence Outreach (MDE-LIO), participation from school groups, collaborations with other agencies, and a special visit from the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education.

In reflection, we appreciate those who have built this facility with a vision of what could be. We live in the present and take in every moment of what this camp has become, while looking to the future and new camp adventures that are on the horizon.

Camp T Usage

791

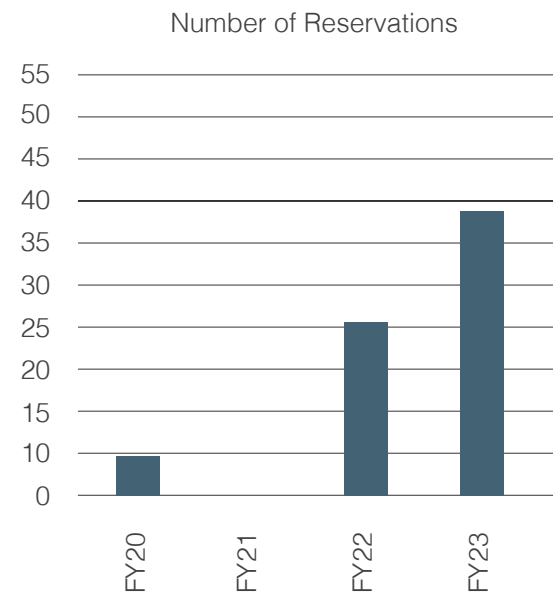
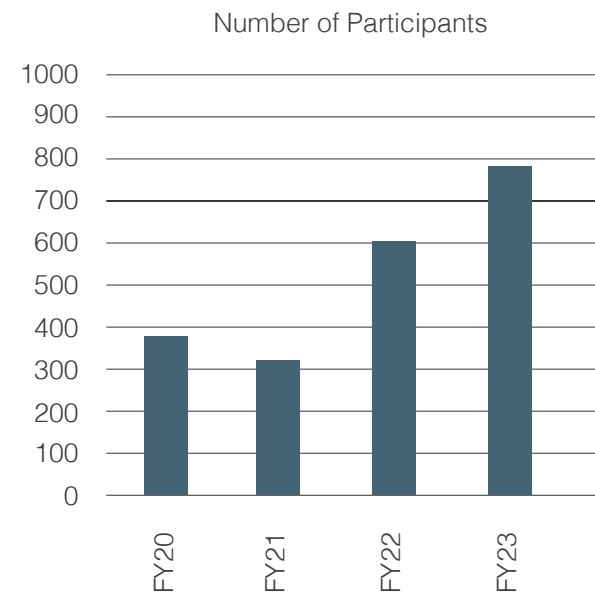
Participants

38

Reservations

9

Camp T Events



Data:

The data for FY20 cover events held between October 1 and September 30.

The data for FY21, 22, and 23 cover events held between October 1 and July 31.

User Groups

Ottawa Area ISD BVI Team

70 Campers
 1 Reservation

DNR Outdoor Adventure Center

18 Campers
 1 Reservation

Family Spring Kits

38 Participants
 0 Reservations

Goalball Clinics

56 Campers
 3 Reservations

ILS Olympics

21 Campers
 1 Reservation

Montcalm ISD

4 Campers
 1 Reservation

Project TOP BSBP Event

80 Campers
 6 Reservations

Western Michigan University

6 Campers
 1 Reservation

DHH Family Camp

19 Campers
 1 Reservation

ESI Training

18 Campers
 2 Reservations

First Stay Away

25 Campers
 1 Reservation

Greenville Public Schools

25 Campers
 1 Reservation

Kent ISD

32 Campers
 1 Reservation

Outdoor Adventure Camp

17 Campers
 1 Reservation

State Board of Education

9 Campers
 1 Reservation

Camp T Cookout

10 Campers
 2 Reservations

Ottawa Area ISD DHH Team

86 Campers
 1 Reservation

Family Nature Club

14 Campers
 1 Reservation

Girl Scouts

58 Campers
 3 Reservations

Hudsonville Special Education

28 Participants
 1 Reservation

Michigan Blind Athletic Association

123 Campers
 6 Reservations

Preschool Packs

6 Participants
 0 Reservations

Boy Scouts

28 Campers
 2 Reservations



Goalball

In 2021, Camp T opened the Oak Recreation Center, a 4,400-square-foot facility designed for goalball. Goalball is a team sport specifically designed for athletes with visual impairments. The sport made its Paralympic Games debut in 1976 and has since gained popularity worldwide.

Goalball is played by two teams of three players each, with the objective of throwing a ball into the opponent's goal. All players wear eye shades to ensure fair competition, as some may have varying degrees of visual ability. The ball used in goalball contains bells inside, allowing players to locate it by sound.

The objective is to throw the ball past the opposing team's defense and into their goal while preventing the other team from scoring. The defending team uses their bodies to block the ball, relying on their hearing and tactile senses to track its movement. Once a team gains possession of the ball, they have ten seconds to throw it back.

Goalball requires teamwork, communication, and strategic positioning. It is a highly competitive and physically demanding sport, as players must use their bodies to block the ball. The game is played in silence to allow players to concentrate on the sounds of the ball and their teammates' instructions.

The sport promotes inclusivity, teamwork, and skill development while offering an exciting and engaging experience for both players and spectators.

In FY23, Camp T partnered with the Michigan Blind Athletic Association (MBAA) to teach goalball to students. Players from the U.S. Men's Goalball Team frequently visited camp to help facilitate youth recreation clinics and promote physical education.

Favorite thing about camp: Connecting with the other adults was definitely up there. And the low ropes course. I loved watching them all try super hard.

-Survey Response



STEM Activities

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education empowers students with knowledge and skills to navigate an increasingly complex and technology-driven world. By fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, STEM education prepares students for the future workforce and drives innovation. It is vital to prioritize inclusivity and diversity in STEM education to unlock the full potential of all individuals and create a more equitable society.

Camp T incorporates STEM education in its programming with activities like making pop bottle rockets, which encompasses a wide range of educational benefits. It integrates physics, engineering, mathematics, scientific inquiry, problem-solving, teamwork, and practical application, all while fostering curiosity and engagement in learning. Launching their own pop bottle rockets is a favorite activity among campers.



Emily was surprised to receive her [spring family fun] package, and her and her brother are enjoying working on the projects together.

-Survey Response



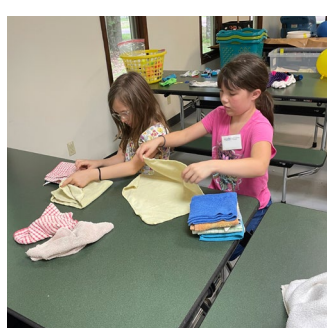


Independent Living Skills

Independent living skills (ILS) refer to the set of abilities and skills necessary for individuals to live and function independently in daily life. These skills encompass a range of activities and tasks that enable individuals to take care of themselves and their homes. Although ILS are essential for everyone, they are particularly important for individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired. Here are some examples of independent living skills:

- hygiene skills
- cooking and meal preparation
- household management
- time management and organization
- money management
- technology skills
- self-advocacy skills
- social skills

In July 2023, Camp T hosted its first annual ILS Olympics event. Families of students who are Blind/Visually Impaired from around the state gathered at Camp T to showcase their independent living skills during a weekend of head-to-head matchups. Campers first learned skills such as cooking, bed-making, laundry folding, cleaning, organization techniques, and even how to shave. They rotated through stations and were scored on how well they learned their new skills and worked together. When participants were not learning a new skill or competing in a match, they were swimming or fishing in the lake. At the end of the competition, one family received the prestigious toilet plunger trophy. First, second, and third place ribbons were awarded to the top three families.

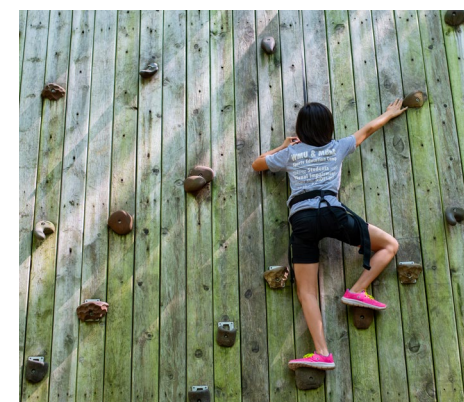
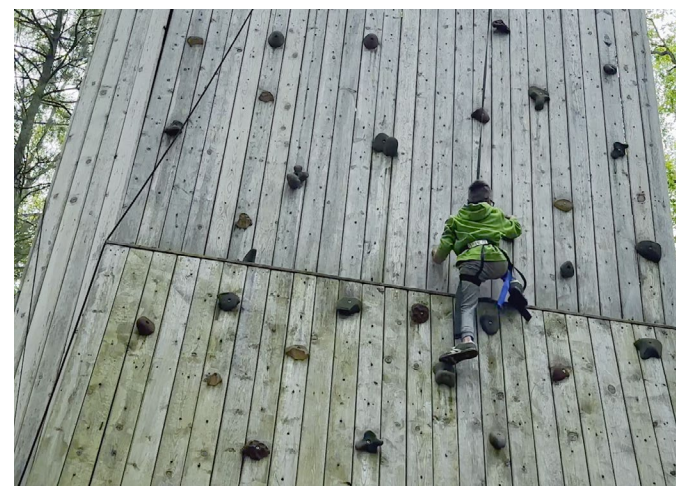
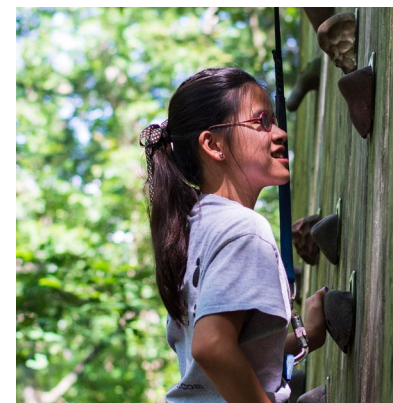


Climbing Wall

Camp T's climbing wall is a highlight for many campers. It promotes physical fitness, enhances cognitive skills, fosters personal development, and provides a unique and inclusive recreational activity that encourages teamwork and social interaction.

Benefits for campers who are BVI:

- tactile exploration
- spatial awareness and body orientation
- sensory integration
- confidence building



Thank you for taking care of my son for four days. When he separated with us, he was crying. However Jill talked to him very kindly, so he was not lonely anymore. Camp T members are amazing, so my son will register for the camp next year too.

-Survey Response

Waterfront

Waterfront activities such as swimming, canoeing, and fishing offer a range of physical and educational benefits. When taking part in these activities, students are able to develop important skills, enhance their sensory experiences, and enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation in an inclusive and supportive environment.

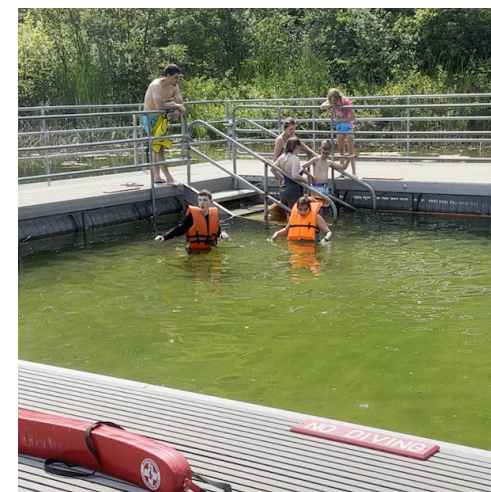
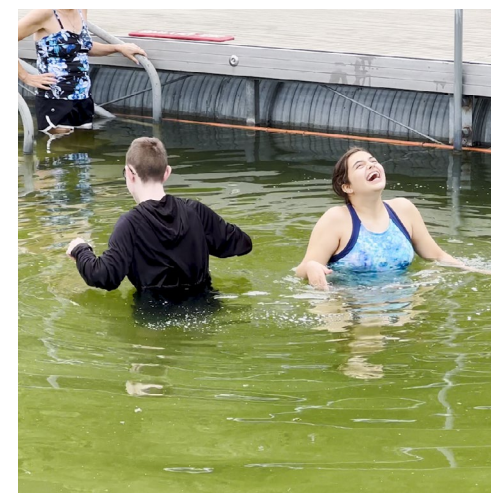
Waterfront activities promote:

- environmental awareness
- sensory experiences
- navigation and spatial skills
- sensory integration
- social interaction and teamwork

Flannigan Lake at Camp T is a special place for campers. A large dock, beach, swimming area, and birding benches offer a variety of ways for campers to enjoy the lake on hot summer days.

Favorite thing about camp: Seeing the kids overcome worry or ambivalence to play or do something new and really enjoy themselves. The athletes teaching goalball were also VERY nice and encouraging and did a great job with teaching.

-Survey Response





OAK RECREATION CENTER



Archery

Teaching archery to students who are BVI involves special adaptations to ensure accessibility and safety. Verbal cues play a crucial role in guiding students through the proper body alignment, draw technique, and aiming process. Additionally, tactile markers are placed strategically on the bow and string to help students feel the correct hand placement and orientation. Safety measures, such as using larger or foam targets, are implemented to create a secure environment, while assistance from instructors or sighted peers helps students position themselves toward the target.

Starting with basic techniques, students are encouraged to build a solid foundation before moving on to more complex skills. Regular verbal feedback is given to help students understand their progress, fostering self-awareness and improvement. By customizing adaptations for individual needs, students who are BVI are able to develop confidence, concentration, and physical coordination through archery.



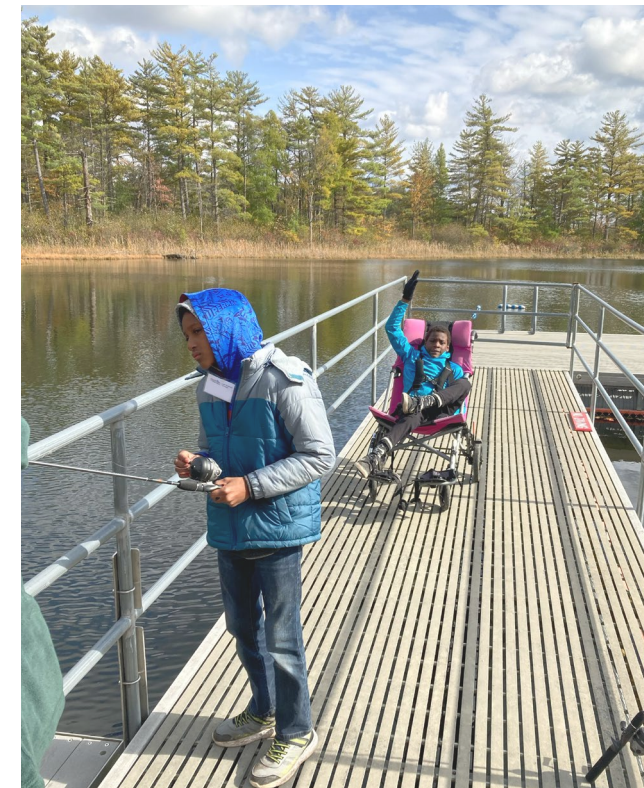
DHH Programming

Camp programs play a large role in supporting students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH), offering an enriching and empowering experience. These programs create an inclusive environment in which students can thrive, develop essential skills, and form lasting friendships. Benefits extend beyond traditional education, providing unique opportunities for personal growth and self-confidence.

At Camp T, students who are DHH are able to fully engage with peers who share similar experiences, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Camp programs promote positive self-identity and self-advocacy skills.

Communication is key for our camp programs. Camp staff provide qualified sign language interpreters to facilitate communication between campers who are DHH and camp staff and peers who are hearing. Consultants who understand the unique needs of students who are DHH are on hand to offer support and guidance.

At our DHH Family Day Camps this year, participants enjoyed scavenger hunts, field games, canoeing, fishing, pumpkin carving, campfires, s'mores, and more.



We had the opportunity to have an ASL interpreter available for my son. He was also able to connect with other DHH children.

-Survey Response



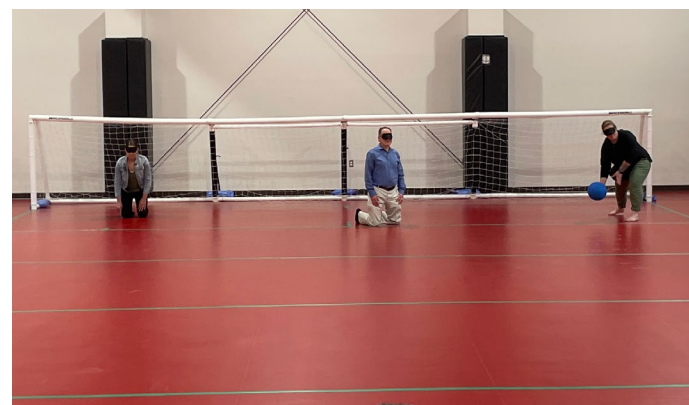


State Board of Education Visit

On May 16, the State Board of Education visited camp for their spring work session. Office of Public and Governmental Affairs Director Martin Ackley presented legislative and budget updates to the Board of Education, including the recommended FY24 governor, House, and Senate budgets. The group enjoyed a lunch prepared by Greenville Public Schools Food Service Director Dan Kuk. Camp T contracts its food service with the school district.

After lunch, Camp T staff met with the board members and gave a tour of camp. Everyone hiked the trails, visited the archery range, climbed the tower, learned how to play goalball, and toured the cabins. The board, including State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice, were impressed by the work being done at Camp T and the programs offered to students around the state.

The group enjoyed their time at camp so much that they have already reserved a day at camp next spring. Camp T staff would like to thank Dr. Rice and the State Board of Education for taking the time to visit camp and for their continued support.



Collaborations



BSBP Project Transitions Outdoor Program (Project TOP)

The Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP) and Camp Tuhsmeheeta (Camp T) collaborated to offer this program, which focuses on learning independent living skills (ILS), improving employability, and increasing quality of life through outdoor experiential activities. This program was open to students in West Michigan who are Blind/Visually Impaired and are affiliated with BSBP. While participating in Project TOP, students worked on functional and adaptive skills in the ILS kitchen and practiced financial literacy and job search skills. Students also learned about recreation and leisure skills while scaling the climbing tower, playing goalball, and hiking the trails at camp.



John Ball Zoo

John Ball Zoo provided a traveling zoo exhibit during Camp T's Mystery Escape Camp. The education team worked with Camp T staff to create fun and interesting clues about the visiting animals to tie them into the weekend's theme. Campers learned about native Michigan animals up close and made memories that will last a lifetime. John Ball Zoo offers a variety of education programs, and they are always happy to visit camp.



Kalamazoo Institute of Arts

After Camp T staff visited the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts (KIA), a KIA docent reached out to volunteer at camp. Camp staff worked with her to provide a variety of supplies for making tactile wall art, including wooden beads, yarn, feathers, and a stick. The piece will be displayed in White Pine Lodge for visitors to enjoy.



Kent Intermediate School District (KISD)

KISD applied and was approved for a mini grant through the Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach. These funds helped cover day camp costs for attendance and supplies. At camp, the group worked on ILS while making fruit pizza and experienced a variety of outdoor recreation and leisure activities. The day camp was full of adventure and excitement for all who were involved.



Michigan Blind Athletic Association (MBAA)

The MBAA and Camp T collaborated on a few projects in 2023. In exchange for practice time in Oak Recreation Center, the MBAA assisted with various events throughout the year. In October, the MBAA led a goalball session during Camp T's Youth Recreation Clinic. MBAA also assisted with leading three goalball clinics in the spring. MBAA players are Blind/Visually Impaired, so they are able to serve as great role models for campers. Each session brought a learning experience that increased campers' confidence each time they were on the court.



Michigan Department of Natural Resources Outdoor Adventure Center (OAC)

The first Camp T Excursion was held at the OAC in Detroit in May. Families from around the state had an opportunity to learn about Camp T and explore OAC exhibits. The Critter Room was a favorite spot, where families were able to interact with native Michigan animals. Families listened to frog calls, touched deer antlers, and even had an opportunity to hold a snake. OAC staff worked with Camp T to provide the best experience for families. During the visit, Camp T gave the OAC braille and large-print copies of facility maps for future visitors to use.

Michigan Braille and Talking Library (BTBL)

BTBL worked with campers during Camp T's Outdoor Adventure Camp in June. One BTBL staff member, Stephanie Wambaugh, brought supplies to make disc weaving art using yarn and CDs. BTBL lends audio and braille books to Michigan residents who are unable to comfortably read standard print materials due to a visual, physical, or reading disability. Wambaugh encouraged campers to join the BTBL network and shared materials so parents can receive information about their services. The CD weaving art project was a great way for campers to learn a new skill and connect with a valuable reading resource.



Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind

Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind (OUB) offers a variety of summer camps each year. This year, OUB offered a science camp and asked Camp T to lead a lesson. Camp T staff spent a few hours building pop bottle rockets with OUB campers. After the rockets were built, campers launched them. An altimeter was used to measure each rocket's altitude. Campers learned about rocket design, air pressure, lift, and force. The campers had a "blast" launching their rockets!



Waverly Middle School

While attending the Michigan Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (MAER) conference this spring, Camp T staff met an orientation and mobility specialist from Ingham County who was interested in helping one of her students introduce goalball to his physical education class at Waverly Middle School. After learning their goals and desired outcome, Camp T staff spent an afternoon at Waverly Middle School, teaching goalball to about 50 eighth-grade students. Each student was able to play for a short period of time while wearing eye shades.



New Nature Center

A new building is coming to Camp T this fall. Workers have been constructing a 3,000-square-foot nature center with large windows to provide views of camp's expansive woods. The center is located across the road from Elm Hall, along the south side of the road into camp. The nature center is divided into four rooms, one of which will be a formal classroom.

The center will house native Michigan taxidermy mounts, spaces for science exploration, a cave area, and much more.

In 1974, Dr. Robert Thompson established Camp T to provide an outdoor education facility for students who are Blind/Visually Impaired. Opening a nature center will allow us to keep Dr. Thompson's dream alive.

Camp T has led outdoor education programs for years, but the nature center will provide a place to offer lessons focused on conservation, ecology, biology, and other science-related fields.

The main structure is expected to be completed at the end of August 2023. Camp T staff will then be able to add interactive displays for campers. We look forward to opening the nature center in the fall so campers can enjoy all it has to offer.



Facility Updates

Completed in 2023:

- upgraded climbing wall cleats
- new archery curtain
- new life vests
- new diesel tank for generators
- new generator installed
- new safety harnesses
- new tree-clearing equipment
- updated water softeners
- new thermostats
- new heating system zone valves
- old tent platforms cleared
- trail added between archery range and climbing wall
- trail added from White Pine Lodge to Oak Recreation Center
- DHH Reading Kits added

Planned for 2024:

- replace roof on Roth Cabin
- improve lighting inside Roth Cabin
- finish interior of nature center
- install shingles on electrical
- purchase picnic tables
- improve and replace signage
- install new dividers in Maple and Birch lodges
- install internet lines to Tamarack and Elm lodges



Staff



Matt Polzin

Camp Consultant (High Adventure Consultant)

Matt provides expertise and guidance in outdoor adventure activities for campers. He assesses safety protocols, recommends adventure options, and ensures memorable experiences for all campers.



Patti Ensing

Office Assistant

Patti assists with various administrative tasks, including managing phone calls, emails, and camper registrations. She maintains organized records, coordinates schedules, and provides excellent customer service to campers and families.



Jason Barnes

Maintenance Lead

Jason is responsible for ensuring the upkeep, cleanliness, and functionality of all camp facilities and equipment. He performs routine inspections, repairs, and maintenance tasks to provide a safe and comfortable environment for campers.



Teri Dykstra

Contracted Greenville Public School Food and Nutrition Lead

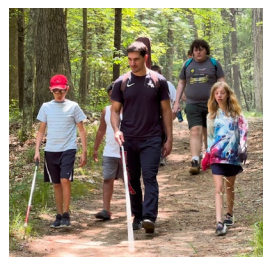
Teri is responsible for creating nutritious and delicious meal plans for campers. She coordinates with camp management to ensure an efficient and well-organized food preparation process.



Leanne Merren

Camp Assistant

Leanne supports the planning and execution of various camp events and activities. She coordinates logistics and ensures a smooth and enjoyable experience for campers.

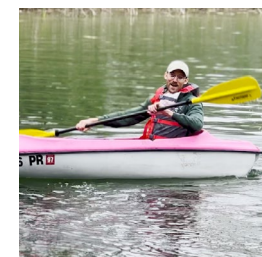
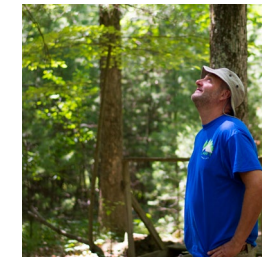


Tyler Merren

Contracted Staff Member

Tyler is a Team USA goalball Paralympian. He regularly assists camp programs and teaches goalball. He emphasizes technique, teamwork, and sportsmanship to promote skill development and an enjoyable experience for all participants.

Thank You



Camp T would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the volunteers and MDE-LIO staff who have made our camp a memorable and joyous experience for students. The smiles on campers' faces are a testament to the positive impact you have on their lives. Thank you for supporting Camp T!

Volunteers

- Carol Allie
- Micah Bormann
- Teresa Gest
- Julie Haase
- Osman Koroma
- John Metz
- Donna Posont
- Norma Strong
- Stephanie Wambaugh

MDE-LIO Staff

- Kelly Dunham
- Amanda English
- Jordan Jackson
- John Kirsh
- Amanda Schneider
- Amy Shepherd

From Campers to Mentors

Empowering Students with Visual Impairments



Camp T is a special place for Tyler and Leanne Merren. Campers in their younger days, the Merrens recently joined Camp T's staff to give back and inspire a new generation of campers who are Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI). Their passion for working with students who are BVI has led them on a winding journey from campers to mentors, leaving a lasting impact on the students they serve.

Tyler, a Paralympic athlete on the Men's U.S. Goalball Team, is Visually Impaired. He grew up in Allegan County, close to Camp T. Leanne, who is Blind, grew up near Detroit. In the 1990s, she spent two summers at Camp T as a camper and a few summers as a camp counselor. Tyler also attended Camp T in the early 2000s, participating in adventure camps, boot camps, and even an art camp. They both share fond memories of those summers, filled with laughter, friends, and nature.

Tyler and Leanne met when they were playing goalball with the Michigan Blind Athletic Association in Kalamazoo.

Tyler says he rolled the ball a little too hard and gave Leanne a concussion.

"He likes to tell people about that, but at least I blocked the ball," Leanne says, laughing.

The two were friends for several years before dating and getting married. They now have four children, ages 23, 20, 15, and 7. All are sighted. Over the years, Tyler and Leanne occasionally volunteered at Camp T, but work opportunities took them to other states.

A New Chapter

In 2022, the Merrens found themselves looking for the next step in their journey as a family. When they heard Camp T was hosting an alumni picnic that summer, it had been 12 years since the Merrens had been back. Leanne and Tyler attended the event, where they had a conversation with MDE-LIO Director Roxanne Balfour about possibly joining Camp T's staff.

Tyler, who owns a personal training business, said traveling made it challenging for him to take on a full-time role, but Leanne's passion for working with students who are BVI made her the ideal candidate for a seasonal camp assistant position. They joined Camp T as contractors last August, and Leanne is now a full-time employee.

An Evolving Camp Experience

Reflecting on their earlier experiences at Camp T, Leanne and Tyler said they have noticed both nostalgic features and exciting changes in their past year working at camp.

"It's such a peaceful place, so that has not changed," Leanne says.

The camp, which once operated solely in the summer, now thrives year-round. They reminisced about the familiar smell of White Pine Lodge, a comforting reminder of the past. And while some things have remained unchanged, like Center Island, new additions such as a climbing wall, low-ropes, and Oak Recreation Center have brought fresh excitement to camp.

Embracing Their Roles

In their roles at camp, Leanne and Tyler complement each other's strengths. As an athlete, Tyler says he enjoys serving as a role model for campers. He actively participates in camps, encouraging students to believe in themselves and not be limited by having a visual impairment. Leanne's position allows her to focus on programming, accessibility, and helping campers learn and practice specific skills. She has also been identifying signs at camp that need to be transcribed into braille for visitors who are BVI.

"We really have a passion for helping students see the potential within themselves and to chase their dreams," Leanne says. "There are so many obstacles for people who are Visually Impaired, and we know those obstacles. Our passion is to tell students that things may seem difficult, and you may have to work a little harder for things sometimes, but it's worth it."



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