Summer Camps: **Special Populations**


Camp Brave Trails, California

As the number of summer camps have grown over the past 150 years, so too have the number of camps serving the vast diversity of special populations. The first of these was a camp for diabetic children, opened by Dr. Elliott Joslin in 1926. Since that time, many camps have opened to serve children with a wide array of special needs, including those with heart conditions, cancer, speech and hearing problems, autism, and Down syndrome. There are also camps for children coping with grief, depression, and eating disorders; and the number of summer camps created especially for LGBTQ+ children continues to grow.


Easterseals Camp, Wisconsin


Easterseals Camp, New Jersey

"For years, camp has been the safe haven for young people from all different walks of life. Camp is where our children become strong, resilient campers, who become competent and compassionate human beings."

Kate Akerman

"When special needs campers live with each other at camp and recognize they are not the only individuals dealing with a specific diagnosis, the outcomes are very positive."

Vance Gilmore


Amputee Coalition Youth Camp, Florida



DISABILITY LINGO GOES TO CAMP!

"At camp we tasted freedom for the first time in our lives."

In the 1970s, disabled teenagers faced a world of social exclusion, isolation, and even institutionalization. Camp Jened, the camp featured in the 2020 documentary *Crip Camp*, exploded those confines. In its atmosphere of equity thrived a community of campers with different disabilities and backgrounds, as well as disabled and non-disabled counselors and staff. It was a transformative community that included disability rights icon Judith Heumann, who became a critical part of the movement that ultimately resulted in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). *Crip Camp* centers the disability community and culture in its telling of this history, highlighting the inclusive cultural practices developed at Camp Jened—having the patience to listen, trusting others to be the experts on their own needs, and prioritizing accommodations like sign interpretation—that encouraged everyone to participate.

Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht,
"The Camp That Ignited a Movement"



Historical Marker for Camp Jened, Hunter, NY

"Jened was transformative, outside camp, we lived in a world all too ready to label, stereotype and exclude us because of our disabilities. At Jened, we could escape the restrictions and stereotypes society had ascribed to us as people with disabilities since the time we were children."

Denise Sherer Jacobson,
1968 Camp Jened attendee




Camp Jened, New York, 1967.

"Wow, Camp Jened was a place that was a utopia. It was a place where all of a sudden the rest of the outside world seemed to just disappear."

Jim Lebrecht, 1971
Camp Jened attendee

Learn more about camps for special populations:

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- Gilmore, Vance. "How Special Needs Camping Has Impacted the Camp Experience." *The Exceptional Parent*, vol. 52, no. 3, TCA EP World LLC, 2022, pp. 40–43.
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- Neff, John M. "Specialized Summer Camps: Provide Benefits for Children and Families Alike." *The Exceptional Parent*, vol. 39, no. 3, TCA EP World LLC, 2009, p. 34–.
- Newnham, Nicole, and Jim LeBrecht. "The Camp That Ignited a Movement." *Ford Foundation*, 5 Aug. 2020, https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/stories/the-camp-that-ignited-a-movement/.