

The Monarch



Camp Dawn 2003

Camp Dawn is a camping program for adult survivors of acquired brain injury living in southwestern Ontario. For this, the inaugural year, camp was a three day / two night adventure taking place at beautiful Huron Church Camp, north of Grand bend, during the first weekend of October.

Camp Dawn was a collaborative effort among six service providers for individuals with acquired brain injuries, including the Brain Injury Association of London and Region. "This was a great example of what can be achieved by several organizations working together", noted Gary Davies, Executive Director of our Association. "The camp atmosphere was excellent for giving campers a chance to relax, meet new friends and have fun, in spite of the cool and windy weather".

The idea of Camp Dawn is that while every day may present challenges, it also provides the opportunity for new adventures and new ways of doing things. It was in this thought that the slogan "With every dawn a new path is found" was adopted. One camper further explained that every day he has a choice: He chooses to treat each day like dawn, and it shows. This is the type of attitude that Camp Dawn promoted. Campers reported being encouraged and inspired to implement new strategies, try new activities, and dream new dreams.

There was a wide variety of structured and unstructured activities offered throughout the weekend: orienteering, hat painting, bingo, hiking, candle making, football, macramé, and camp fires, to name but a few! Although no one had to participate, everyone found plenty of activities that they chose to engage in. But, as everyone who has ever attended camp knows, camp is not all fun and games! Each cabin took turns preparing and cleaning up after meals ... and ya know what? That was fun, too!

The food rocked! It all tasted great and it was obvious what everything was! There was none of that "mystery meat" that camp is famous for. In addition to the great meals, there was a snack counter open all the time. Whenever anyone wanted a drink or something to eat they could just help themselves. Coffee, tea, fruit, cheese and crackers, and ... best of all ... homemade cookies were available at any time night or day!

"The feel" during the weekend was one of camaraderie and collaboration. Campers and volunteers worked and played alongside each other. Arden McGregor, a volunteer from our Association, observed "It was amazing how quickly we all seemed to step outside the familiar roles of 'professional' or 'client' and we just hung out as regular people sharing the

experience." It wasn't always obvious who was a survivor and who was a volunteer. Everyone just seemed to blend in. A camper was just as likely as a volunteer to provide a necessary prompt or lend a helping hand. One camper from Hamilton added, "There was always someone to help". Tracy Terluin, a camper from London, joined in and said, "it is great to get the help you need without getting the feeling that you're being watched all the time". The group sitting around the table knew exactly what she meant.

Camp Dawn was a chance to meet and make new friends, regardless of any differences in ability and disability. It was also a chance for campers to explore their common experiences. Susan Tideswell, a camper from London learned, "I'm not the only one going through this. I don't feel so alone anymore. It really boosted my confidence level." She added, "I got to meet other people with brain injuries, and we've phoned and emailed each other."

Watch for Camp Dawn 2004 coming next fall! There are opportunities for campers, volunteers, and sponsors. It is an experience what you won't want to miss ... it might change your life!

Arden McGregor, Susan Tideswell and Tracy Terluin, who attended Camp Dawn in October 2003 collaborated on the preparation of this article.