



Joyful Friends Summer Camp and After-Care

Making a Difference for Children with a Difference

Central Christian Community Services, Inc

1. Identifying a Community Need

Too many children with moderate to severe developmental delays and /or intellectual disabilities who also exhibit moderate to severe maladaptive behaviors do not have access to the behavioral help they need when school is not in session. There are only two summer camps in Manatee County that serve this challenging population. As a result, many parents, guardians, and caregivers are forced to stay home during the summer as they cannot afford the specialized care these children need to thrive.

Terms used in this document.

In various places you will read the words disability, delay, and difference. Please see the Glossary of Terms in the appendix for definitions. While disability and delay are needed medical and clinical terms, we will often refer to these children as having differences in development and intelligence, as all children do. We live in a neurodiverse world and want to provide summer camp services that are inclusive of those with challenging differences and specifically focused on their special needs. Likewise, the behaviors of the population we seek to serve can be described as maladaptive, distressed, or challenging, depending upon the intended reader, a medical professional or parent. Since this document is for a multitude of audiences, we will use these terms interchangeably with no intent for offense or inaccuracy.

1.1 Potential Client Population

Manatee County has approximately 50,200 students. According to the CDC about 1 in 6 children have developmental disabilities which means over 8,500 children in the county may need extra help when school is not in session during the summer. About two-thirds are considered to have moderate to severe delays and two-thirds of those exhibit behaviors such as aggression towards others or they are self-injurious, engage in property destruction, have toileting challenges or elopement (running away) {see appendix for a further description of these behaviors}. Approximately 3,700 children in Manatee county need specialized behavioral help that typical summer camps are not equipped to provide, we estimate over 1,000 of them are elementary-school age.

1.2 Current Service Availability

It takes specialized behavioral training and often one-on-one staffing to provide a safe, fun, educational and nurturing summer camp experience for this challenging population. It is cost-prohibitive for most summer camps and most families. Currently there are only two summer camps in the county that are staffed and trained to serve these 1000+ Elementary school-aged children who may exhibit these behaviors.

- Foundation for Dreams & Dream Oaks Camp

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- Southwest Florida Easter Seals Summer Camp

Combined, both existing summer camps enroll less than 100 children per summer.

1.3 Impact on Children and Parents

Most of the remaining children with these behaviors either attend a summer camp that is ill-equipped to provide for their needs or they stay home for the summer. Either option often results in regression from their school Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals, an increase in maladaptive or distressed behaviors, and parents who cannot work or put their jobs in jeopardy because the ill-equipped summer camp cannot handle those types of behaviors and call the parent out of work several times during the summer.

The impact on parents or caregivers are illustrated in these following two studies concerning families living with children on the autism spectrum.

According to Autism and Health: A Special Report by Autism Speaks, it is estimated that on average, it costs around \$60,000 a year and 1.4 to 2.4 million across a lifetime to care for someone with autism. [4] The majority of these costs are in special education and lost parental income. The need to find and sustain year-round employment is intensified for families and caregivers of children on the autism spectrum. Summer months present unique challenges for these caregivers as school is out and available respite services are extremely limited.

According to an article published in June 2019, by The Center for American Progress, titled, *“When Parents Can’t Find Summer Child Care, Their Work Suffers”*, working parents identify finding summer care a “logistical and financial headache.” [5] One of the most notable findings was that in at least 57% percentage of families, one or more parents make a job sacrifice during the summer. [6] Within this article, many parents reported challenges related to caring for children with developmental and intellectual differences. It goes without saying that summer job sacrifices among parents and caregivers of children with behavioral challenges is most likely significantly higher.

2. Solution to the Community Need

Joyful Friends Summer Camp is a new program being initiated by a new non-profit in Florida, Central Christian Community Services, Inc.

2.1 Our Purpose

The purpose of this non-profit is to provide childcare outside the home for school-age children with developmental and intellectual disabilities who have special needs including those who exhibit challenging behaviors.

2.2 Our Vision

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We envision a world that embraces the neurodiversity of humanity where every child with developmental and intellectual differences will be able to access superior quality summer camps and after-school care programs tailored to their needs.

2.3 Our Mission

Joyful Friends Summer Camp will provide a loving, nurturing, educational and fun summer camp experience that is safe and inclusive.

- We utilize structure activities and curriculum to foster physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and academic development.
- We are committed to maintaining or advancing these campers' educational and behavioral goals during the summer months.
- We enable parents and caregivers to maintain gainful employment when their children are out of school.

2.4 Core Values

- Inclusiveness
- Community
- Collaboration

3. Overview of Summer Camp Program

3.1 Dense Activity Schedule

One of the key items to support a diagnosis of developmental delays like autism or an intellectual disability like Down syndrome is an adherence to routines. There are significant number of studies that demonstrate the overall effectiveness of activity schedules for individuals diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. [7]

Joyful Friends Summer Camp will include dense activity schedules throughout the entirety of the camp experience {see appendix for a sample daily schedule}. The schedules will include times, activities, expectations, and visual and auditory cues. Some of the benefits of dense activity schedules are:

- Minimizes unoccupied time
- Minimizes motivation to engage in maladaptive behaviors
- Establishes routine
- Promotes independence
- Provides predictability, structure, and stability
- Increases in social and emotional health
- Improves cooperation
- Increases relationships

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- Improves feeling of safety
- Decreases stress

3.2 Planned Transition Strategies

A shift from one task to another may be easy for a typical developing child, however, it is intensely challenging for children with a developmental or intellectual disability because they struggle with making the cognitive adaptation to moving on to another task. As a result, it often results in frustration, stress, and anxiety.

In order to alleviate some of the challenges surrounding transitions for children with ASD and other differences, it is imperative that transition strategies are used. Transition strategies are techniques used to support individuals with ASD during changes in or disruptions to activities, settings, or routines. The techniques can be used before a transition occurs, during a transition, and/or after a transition, and can be presented verbally, auditorily, or visually.

Some benefits of utilizing transition strategies are below:

- Optimizing time by reducing the amount of time needed to transition
- Decreasing maladaptive behaviors and increasing appropriate behaviors during transitions
- Promoting independence
- Increasing predictability

Some specific transition strategies that will be utilized are:

- Visual countdown
- Verbal reminders at 5 minutes, 3 minutes, 1 minute, 10 seconds
- Auditory notifications that correspond with transition times
- Visual of next activity
- Reinforcement for successful transition
- Prepared materials for next activity
- Least to most support to promote independence

3.3 Educational Components

There is significant support for continuing educational curriculum during summer months. Even typically developing students often experience regression in learned skills throughout the summer. For student with developmental and intellectual differences, the regression in skills is often monumental in comparison to that of typically developing students. Including educational components in Joyful Friends Summer Camp will have the following impact:

Prevent Summer Regression

Regression is the forgetting of acquired skills, most of the time after school breaks, such as summer vacation. The gap in educational instruction often severely affects a child's ability to

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maintain skills. Including structured educational components within a camp suitable for kids with special needs is the most effective way to prevent a child from experiencing summer regression.

Continuation of IEP Goals

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. IEPs contain specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound goals that outline what they should achieve during the school year. Developing methods to accomplish these goals are essential to a child's overall educational development. Though teachers work hard to achieve goals outlined at the onset of the school year, it sometimes proves difficult to accomplish all goals before the end of the school year. We will include educational curriculum that support the continuation of IEP goals from the prior school year. In doing this, we hope to accelerate continuous learning throughout the summer and facilitate a faster acquisition of skills.

Facilitate Back-to-School Transitions

Parents and caregivers of students with ASD often struggle to continue to provide structure and routine throughout the summer months. Summer breaks from school mean being away from the traditional classroom setting for roughly 3 months. Research shows that following this extensive break, students often struggle to transition back to school after unstructured summer breaks. Incorporating an educational component into Joyful Friends Summer Camp will provide cohesiveness in the school year and summer and allow for a smoother transition back into the traditional school setting.

3.4 Physical Fitness Components

Many kids with these developmental and intellectual differences do not initiate participation in the sports or recreational activities that their peer groups do. Therefore, they miss the social and health benefits that exercise provides. Our summer camp will provide structured physical fitness curriculum and activities that focus on gross motor development and promoting a healthier lifestyle.

3.5 Social Skills Curriculum

Social skill deficits are one of the most important diagnostic characteristics for individuals diagnosed with ASD. For kids with developmental delays, summer breaks from school mean fewer opportunities to practice these social skills. Fewer opportunities to practice social skills can result in an inability to establish and maintain healthy friendships.

Social skills curriculums provide explicit teaching and activities to systematically target socially appropriate behaviors. We have carefully chosen an evidence-based curriculum and programs that include components to meet each camper's unique needs.

Areas of focus will include:

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- Communication
- Being part of a group
- Expressing feelings
- Caring for oneself and others
- Social problem solving
- Managing conflict
- Listening

3.6 Field Trips

Campers will participate in several field trips with parent/caregiver approval in advance. Transportation will be provided to and from the field trip location. When returning from field trips, the daily schedule will commence corresponding with the current time. Field trip may include locations like the following:

- Zoom Tampa
- Clearwater Marine Aquarium
- The Ringling Circus Museum
- The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature
- Smugglers Cove Adventure Golf
- Splash Harbor Water Park

4. Staffing and Training

4.1 Staff

Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA)

Joyful Friends Summer Camp is being designed and developed by a master's level BCBA.

We will always have at least one supervising BCBA on staff and on-site. We may also have a Board-Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst on staff and on-site as well.

Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT) / Direct Support Professionals (DSP)

Our direct support professionals will either already be Registered Behavior Technicians, or we will provide the approved training needed to attain their RBT status.

Interns and Volunteer Staff

We will also have additional support staff to include college interns taking ABA coursework and volunteers.

Camp Director

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Overall leadership and responsibility for all camp activities and administration.

On-Call Nurse

We will always have a nurse available on-call whenever the camp operates.

4.2 Client / Staff Ratio

The final client staff ratio will depend on the final selection of campers and the requirements of their IEP and Behavior Plan. For example:

- 2 campers that require 1:1 support will be supported with 2 RBTs or trained DSPs
- 2 campers that require 1:2 support will be supported by 1 RBT or trained DSP
- 6 campers that require 1:3 support will be supported by 2 RBTs or trained DSPs

The client/staff ratio relates to RBTs and DSPs. Interns and volunteers are additional needed support staff to coordinate and help implement activities and support the RBTs and DSPs who will always remain with the campers.

4.3 Training

The following training will be provided to the necessary staff prior to the start of camp:

- 40-hour Registered Behavior Technician course
- Quality Behavioral Solutions (QBS) Safety Care Training
- First-Aid and CPR Training
- Lifeguard Training
- STAR Educational Curriculum Training
- PATHS Social Skills Curriculum Training
- SPARK Physical Fitness Curriculum Training

5. Facility and Property

Joyful Friends Summer Camp is located on a 10-acre wooded property in the middle of Bradenton. It is a park-like setting with a small pond and walking trails, a fenced-in playground and plenty of space for outdoor camp activities.

The camp facility is in a 6000 sq. ft. building with three classrooms, two large meeting/activity rooms and two sensory rooms.

5.1 Meals

Parents and caregivers will be expected to provide their campers with a lunch they bring. We will have parent-approved snacks and drinks available for the morning and afternoon.

5.2 Transportation

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Parents and caregivers will have to provide transportation to and from the camp. We will provide transportation to any parent-approved field trips.

5.3 Hours of Operation

Joyful Friends Summer Camp will operate Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. from Monday June 7th, 2021 to Friday July 30th, 2021. The only exception will be on Monday July 5th, when the camp will be closed in observance of Independence Day.

5.4 Sign In / Sign Out Procedure

To guarantee the safety of the campers, we will require all campers to be signed in and out by a parent or a guardian each day. We will require parent/guardian to show a valid photo identification before we release the camper when signing out. Campers are to be signed in and out electronically using an attendance application on an iPad. A designated staff will meet parent/guardian at the door, retrieve camper, and collect camp folder (inclusive of communication book). Upon parent/guardian arrival at the end of the day, a designated staff member will notify the direct support staff of each camper that their parent has arrived. The direct support staff will assist the camper in retrieving their belongings and take them to their parent/guardian.

6. Collaboration with Parents and Other Providers

Stakeholder collaboration will be essential to the overall success of Joyful Friends Summer Camp. Collaboration meetings should be held no later than camp training week. Wherever possible collaboration meetings will include parents, teachers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, social worker, BCBA's, camp staff, etc. The purpose of the meeting will be to establish summer goals for each child that are consistent with goals worked on during the school year. Monthly correspondence will be sent to all stakeholders to ensure transparency in student progress.

6.1 Record Keeping

Communication Books

Communication books will be used for camp staff to communicate with parents. Communication books are to be sent home daily and returned to camp the following day. Communication books will detail various aspect of each camper's day such as behaviors exhibited, overall mood, food consumed, progress with goals, participation levels, etc. Parents will also use the book to communicate any pertinent information from home (i.e. camper didn't sleep well the night before, etc.)

IEP goal Progress

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Prior to implementing educational curriculum, we will establish a baseline for all camper's educational goals. We will track each camper's performance on their goals and prepare a final report at the end of the summer that details their overall progress.

Attendance

There is significant evidence to support the effects of attendance on a student's progress. We will use the daily sign in and out procedure to keep track of each camper's attendance.

Parent, Teacher and Other Provider Survey

After summer camp has concluded and the camper has transitioned back into school a survey will be sent to parents and where possible to teachers and other providers to ascertain the campers progress and retention of skills.

7. Expected Benefits and Impact of Program

Summer camps provide meaningful activities that fosters creativity, independence, confidence, leadership, and friendships. Summer camps that combine learning environments with these meaningful activities allow campers to develop necessary life-long skills. Some of the particular benefits and impact for children with intellectual and developmental delays who attend summer camps are:

7.1 Benefits for Camper

Improvement in Behavior

There are noticeable changes in the behavior of children who attend summer camp. Some of these improvements include increased independence, behavior changes, and social improvements.

Like-Minded Friends

Attending camp can provide campers with like-minded friends who understand one another. Camp can offer them the opportunity to find people who have their similar differences and can relate to their day-to-day challenges.

New Skills

Camps designed for children with developmental and intellectual disability can provide a means of learning new skills that otherwise may not have been acquired. Providing opportunities to learn and master these skills can give them a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Lasting Friendships

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Attending a summer camp can help attendees gain life-long friendship and develop much needed social skills. Having friends that you see year-after-year can have a significant impact on self-esteem and overall well-being.

Getting Unplugged

Electronics have become a large part of the lives of many children with and without developmental delays. Camp provides an opportunity to fill space with more than just electronics.

Gaining Independence

Structured camps provide a plethora of opportunities to increase independence.

Problem Solving

Camp provides excellent opportunities to develop problem solving and organizational skills.

7.2 Impact on Families

Summer presents unique challenges for families of individuals with differences. Research shows that therapeutic summer camps result in significant positive benefits for those families. [1]

Enjoyment

From seeing child participate in camp, parents report a sense of enjoyment and excitement as they see their child participate in certain activities at camp. According to a study, when the parents were unable to see their child directly participate at camp, they discussed how they enjoyed listening to their child recall their experiences. [2]

Improved Perception of Child

As the parent/caregiver observed or received reports of activities engaged in at camp, some of their perceptions of their children's abilities began to change.

Decreased Stress

Study shows that summer camp provides a remedy to decrease stress in families of children with exceptional needs. [3] The reduction in stress can be attributed to a number of factors. One of the most notable factors is the alleviation of the need to find a safe and stimulating environment for their child to attend.

Increased Time for Other Activities

Summer camp helps parents/caregivers accomplish other tasks while camp provides an environment that meets the child's specific needs. It frees them up to be able to do things they typically struggle to do like grocery shopping, running errands, and joining activities with their friends and family.

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Improvement in Sleep Patterns

Some of the parents noted that they were unable to have consistent bedtime and wake-up schedule at home during the summer months because they had to devote constant care to the child with special needs. Parents reported significant improvements in sleep patterns when their children participated in summer camps.

Increased Hope

Summer camp broadened families view and perspective about what their child could do. Parents have reported that interacting with other parents at camp helped them cope with their emotions regarding their child, which also attributed to decreased stress. One mother reported that her feelings regarding her child were validated when she was able to share some of her emotions with another mother at camp.

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Developmental Disability

According to the CDC, developmental disabilities are a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. Some of the most common are autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyper-activity disorder, cerebral palsy, and other developmental delays.

Developmental Delay

A developmental delay refers to a child who has not gained the developmental skills expected of him or her, compared to others of the same age. Delays may occur in the areas of motor function, speech, and language, cognitive, play, and social skills. Global developmental delay means a young child has significant delays in two or more of these areas of development.

Developmental Difference

Developmental disability and developmental delays are medical and clinical terms. Many parents desire to avoid the potential negative connotations of those words and their impact on the perception of their children. The word difference is often substituted for disability or delay.

Additionally, many adults on the autism spectrum have communicated a desire for the manifestations of their autism to be considered differences rather than disabilities.

Intellectual Disability

According to the CDC, intellectual disability is a term used when there are limits to a person's ability to learn at an expected level and function in daily life. Some of the most commonly known causes of intellectual disability – like Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, fragile X syndrome, genetic conditions, birth defects, and infections – happen before birth.

Intellectual Difference

Like the use of developmental difference, intellectual difference has become a commonly accepted term in referring to this population with conditions previously referred to as intellectual disabilities.

Neurodiversity

Individual differences in brain functioning regarded as normal variations within the human population. The concept that differences in brain functioning within the human population are normal and that brain functioning that is not neurotypical should not be stigmatized.

According to Psychology Today (online) Neurodiversity is the idea that variation in brain function exists across the population. Differences such as autism and ADHD have existed

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throughout human history and are not due to faulty neural circuitry. Rather than viewing them as such, neurodiversity embraces autism as a different way of thinking and behaving.

You may notice the Joyful Friends logo incorporates the accepted symbol for neurodiversity.

Maladaptive Behaviors

Behaviors that stop a person from adapting to new or difficult circumstances. They are used by those with social anxiety to attempt to manage their fear in social situations.

Challenging Behaviors

More than half of kids and teens with autism may be physically aggressive toward caregivers or other kids and grown-ups. This can include:

- hitting, kicking, biting
- being hyperactive, anxious, and worried
- hurting themselves by banging or hitting their heads
- biting their hands and fingers

Elopement

Successful and/or unsuccessful attempts to leave the designated area without adult supervision and/or permission. Nearly half of children diagnosed with ASD engage in elopement.

Aggression

Exhibiting one of the following (or similar) behaviors that have the potential to cause harm to another person: Hitting, spitting, kicking, biting, pinching, scratching, pushing, head-butting, and hair pulling. Up to 68% of children diagnosed with ASD engage in aggression.

Property destruction

Any instance of an individual throwing items that are not designed to be thrown with enough force that the object lands at least 3 feet from the student's body and is not intended to be thrown at another person (aggression). Any instance of purposely breaking an item.

Self-Injurious Behaviors

Intentional, direct injuring of body tissue. To include pinching, hitting, biting, etc. oneself. Nearly 28% of children diagnosed with ASD engage in self-injurious behaviors.

Toileting Issues

Any issues with toileting to include dependent toileting, fecal smearing, rectal digging, etc.

Appendix 2: Example Summer Camp Day

MORNING SCHEDULE	
8:00am-9:00am	Sign in/Drop-off/Breakfast
9:00am-9:30am	Morning meeting
9:30am-9:40am	Transition
9:40am 10:10am	Structured goals (IEP)/Speech/OT/Behavioral services
10:10am 10:20am	Transition
10:20am-10:50am	Physical fitness(gross motor)/Art (fine motor)
10:50am-11:00am	Transition
11:00am-11:30am	Structured goals (IEP)/Speech/OT/Behavioral services
11:30am-11:40am	Transition
11:40am-12:10pm	Student lunch

AFTERNOON SCHEDULE	
12:10pm-12:20pm	Transition
12:20pm-1:20pm	Structured free time(stations)/Rotating staff lunch
1:20pm-1:30pm	Transition
1:30pm-2:30pm	Specialist activity (Cooking, Movie, Music, Water Play, Story Time)
2:30pm-2:40pm	Transition
2:40pm-3:10pm	Structured goals (IEP)/Speech/OT/Behavioral services
3:10pm-3:20pm	Transition
3:20pm-3:50pm	Snack and Chat
3:50pm-4:00pm	Transition
4:00pm-4:30pm	Structured free time(stations)
4:30pm-5:00pm	Evening meeting

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