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An open letter to parents considering sending their child to the Healthy Kids Camps:

Dear All:

Although we do not know one another, I wanted to take this opportunity to share our family's experience with Camp Timber Creek in the hope that it may in some small way make your decision about parting with your son or daughter a little easier. This year marks the third year we are sending our son, Aaron, to camp to be a part of the great adventure hosted there by Mr. Ira Green and his staff and counselors.

I was perusing the Internet for weight reduction strategies for our son, when I happened to stumble upon a reference, followed it up, and began to explore the website for the camp. I should add that of all of the camps from which I requested information, Mr. Green's was the first and best response. Other camps sent glossy brochures and cool videos about a week after my inquiry, but by that time I had already e-mailed Mr. Green and received an e-mail almost immediately in response. He followed that initial contact with a personal telephone call and an invitation to visit during the open house the camp was hosting.

I must mention that Aaron was born with a developmental disability that makes him stand out a bit, in that he processes language more slowly, has kind of awkward social interaction skills, and, at the time we began contemplating camp, was only an emerging reader. Aaron has always been a loner due to these differences. He has always had to be in special education classrooms and has been kept pretty much segregated from his typically developing peers, because this was the only venue the public school system would provide to educate children like our son, who needed special education services. As his family, we accept Aaron's differences, and expect that those who care for him will accept him for who he is, a healthy, albeit a little overweight, loving, and good-natured child. Because I did not wish to bias Mr. Green's opinion of Aaron, I don't believe I ever mentioned this matter to him, preferring to give Mr. Green the chance to meet and form his own opinion of Aaron and then advise us whether Aaron would do well at camp.

We went to the open house and had the opportunity to meet Mr. Green and some of the staff, as well as to walk the campus. At that time the folks were hard at cleaning and repairing the facility and bringing all to a state of readiness for the incoming campers. Mr. Green met Aaron for the first time at the open house and the two of them hit it off swimmingly. Mr. Green never acted as though he noticed anything was exceptional about Aaron. We were shown the dorms, met the nurse, checked out the gym, cafeteria, library, and locations for the staff, which were just up the hill. I was sold on the idea of Aaron participating at camp, because there was a fabulous itinerary that involved white water rafting and visiting Carrowinds Theme Park, and just a host of great activities directed towards re-educating campers about eating habits and nutrition and exposing them to recreational experiences that Aaron had never had.

The rest is history. Camp Timber Creek was a successful experience not only for Aaron, but also for his parents as well. Aaron lost about 20 or so pounds that first summer, but more importantly, it was his first chance as a teen to attend a dance, board away from home, make friends outside the family circle, and come into his own, so to speak. And although I saw my burly construction-worker husband break down in tears when we pulled away from camp, because he was so truly apprehensive about leaving Aaron with strangers in a place about 10 hours distant from our home, and although I cried in the kitchen many times during son's sojourn because I missed him so much, it was still a great thing for us, because we were learning to trust and to let go, just a little bit, enough to believe that Aaron could make it in the world without his family's intervention.

Although we provided Aaron with a calling card so he could phone home, Aaron could not enter the sequence of digits it required in time to enable the connection. Mr. Green paired Aaron with one of his counselors, who assisted him to phone, and even lent him his cell phone so he could continue to reach us. The upshot was that Aaron had such a great time, he telephoned one evening toward the end of his initial two-week stay to ask whether we would allow him to stay a third week. I knew then more than at any other time, that he was truly enjoying himself.

Mr. Green had also set up a Camp Timber Creek account with Bunk 1 where electronically, over the Internet, parents could see about a million pictures of their campers in action, hiking trails, swimming, running, rock wall climbing, fencing, you name it. The entire office used to gather around my work station when a new crop of these photos came in, and cheer Aaron on. It moves me to tears now to write this. Those expressions of faith, even remembered, still mean so very much.

The hardest part for us as parents sending our son to camp was *believing*. I write now to ask you to believe. Camp Timber Creek can be a great experience for your own son or daughter. It is so much more than just a place to lose weight. You will not be disappointed and neither will your child. I was pleased to note that the second season we brought Aaron, Mr. Green had used some of the tuition money the families had paid to send their children to camp to start a scholarship fund for families who lacked the resources to be able to send their children. I was also pleased to note that many of Mr. Green's original staff had recommitted to a second summer at Camp Timber Creek. All of this says volumes. In conclusion I would only add that I have included my address, telephone and e-mail information on the letterhead. I would welcome your comments, should you have a desire to contact me.

Sincerely,

MaryAnn Walker-Jordan
Parent