

A vibrant collage of diverse children's faces, including a young girl with blonde hair, a boy with a wide smile, a girl with dark curly hair, and a boy with a neutral expression. The word "SUMMER" is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters across the center of the image. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage and a blue sky.

# SUMMER



## LIKE HORSES FOR COURSES

# CAMPS

**We often hear the phrase “one size fits all.”** However, this is not always the case—especially when picking just the right summer camp to meet the needs (and interests) of your child.

My English grandfather, an enthusiastic racehorse owner, used to say that some horses preferred the hard, dry race tracks of the chalk uplands when others preferred the heavier going on the wet, clay land courses. Some preferred an uphill finish and others a flatter race course. In other words, if you wanted your horse to win you had better pick the race course that suited his preferences. So too it is with summer camps.

There are a large number of summer camps around the country offering programs for campers who are typical or who have special needs. They offer a variety of experiences, from outward bound to academic coaching, from social adventures to nurturing support.

This article shares some experiences of campers and their parents. We have changed the names of the campers but not the camps. It is not designed to recommend any particular camp but to encourage the reader to seek out the right camp for their child—the right course for their horse!

### **My adventurous summer, by a young student**

**O**ver the summer I went to a summer camp in North Carolina called SOAR. It is a camp that focuses on students with ADHD. I stayed there for twenty-six days. I participated in rafting, canoeing, rappelling, rock climbing, tubing, paddle-boarding, and camping. In addition, I also worked on academics.

I didn't want to go at first, but I started to enjoy it and had a lot of fun. It taught me to be independent and responsible. Every day, everyone would get a set of roles to do for the day and the roles would rotate. For example, someone would be in charge of personal hygiene and another person would be in charge of cleaning up trash. When it was my turn to do one of the roles, I did it and

this helped out everyone else in the group. It taught me responsibility and being a part of a community. I did not want to let anyone down.

It is hard for me to focus at times as I get easily distracted, but I still completed my jobs because I was expected to do so. I also did some things that I would not normally do. I went rock climbing very high up, as it was a rock face at the top of a mountain. I felt kind of nervous at first, but then I got used to it and managed to get to a high point. I felt really happy that I completed this challenging task and proud of taking the risk.

It is challenging for me to go outside my comfort zone, but my counselor came up with a motto called “Just Send It,” which means just do it. For example, when I was nervous about jumping into a cold lake, he repeated this motto to me, and I jumped. I will take this idea and apply it to anything that I come across that might make me anxious or nervous, whether it is learning how to be better at managing my attention or anything I may face in my life.

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SOAR is an accredited ADHD outdoor adventure summer camp, boarding school, and GAP year program serving youth and young adults (ages 8–24) with ADHD and other learning disabilities. SOAR has camps in North Carolina, Wyoming, California, and Florida, as well as international program sites. This outdoor adventure-based program provides academic instruction, experiential education, and life skills development.

## An interview with a student turned camper

**L**UCY H., a current student enrolled at Brehm Preparatory School, first attended Brehm's Summer Program in 2018. Her father recently shared his thoughts: "Brehm's Summer Program emphasizes the positive benefits of summer, which centers on social engagement, self-confidence, experiential learning, skills retention as well as a zest and enthusiasm for learning." Lucy also shared her experience with Ms. Montoya, a speech and language pathologist and director of the Brehm Summer Program.

### Q: What did you like about the summer program?

A: It was fun, filled with a lot of adventures from a camping trip in Santa Claus, Indiana, to a high ropes course at Touch of Nature in Makanda, Illinois.

### Q: What kind of life lessons did you learn during those adventures?

A: I learned that even though I was scared going into the activity if I would just be brave I would find the courage to complete the activity.

### Q: How did you find the courage to face the things you were scared of and take the risk?

A: I got a lot of support from Maddie, a Brehm CIT (counselor in training) and the staff. They encouraged me and helped me to overcome my fear.

### Q: How did the summer program help you transition into the regular academic year at Brehm Preparatory School?

A: I already had formed friendships with other girls who were also attending summer program. I felt like summer program helped me to become more social.

### Q: Would you attend the summer program again and why?

A: Yes, It's fun and you get to meet new people.

### Q: Did you like the classes during the summer program, and which one was your favorite class?

A: Yes, and my favorite was social skills class because I learned about emotions and social skills.

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Brehm Summer Program is a holistic, four-week, coed boarding program for students ages 11–18, designed to advance students' academic, social, and emotional skills by helping them acquire a better understanding of themselves, their peers, and the world around them. This immersive and potentially transformative experience allows students to break out of their usual routines, gain fresh perspectives, and make new friends. Team-building exercises inspire camaraderie and self-confidence as students engage in learning experiences that capture their imaginations and make learning fun.



## From giant void to fun-filled summers: A parent's view

**M**OST CHILDREN look forward to a summer full of fun activities and friends to enjoy it with. However, when you have a child with social issues, the summer suddenly becomes a giant void that seems impossible to fill. I discovered Camp Sequoia when my son was in sixth grade, and we went to visit in the spring. He liked it and I liked it, so he went.

It was difficult the first week, but then it clicked and the next two weeks flew by for him. Freddie attended each year for *seven* years, the last two years being a part of the LIT program, which stands for leader in training.

The camp is full of numerous activities and trips. However, I would have to say that the friendships that he has made are the most important piece. Children with social issues have difficulty sustaining friendships over a lengthy period of time. During the school year, Frankie would connect with his Sequoia friends on Xbox, Skype, and trips that the camp would run throughout the school year.

Another thing that I am impressed by is the continuity and expertise that the camp provides through their counselors. Freddie has received emails and birthday cards from his counselors. They have been able to see his growth from a defiant teen to a mature young man. This past year, Freddie was able to work as a counselor in training for the entire summer at the camp. He absolutely fell in love with the job and grew so much as a person. Listening to his perspective on the other side as a counselor was so enjoyable to hear.

Camp Sequoia takes their job very seriously and treats each child individually with respect and great kindness. Brian Lux and his crew train the employees and work so hard to make sure that every child grows and enjoys the camp. During the summer, I received weekly phone calls about Freddie's progress and at the end of the summer, received a lengthy summary. Suddenly, summer vacation was a time for both of us to look forward to and not dread. It was time to go to Camp Sequoia!

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Camp Sequoia serves children and teenagers age 7–17 who are actively improving their social skills. Many have ADHD and other similar diagnoses who do not need the level of support offered at special needs overnight camps, yet need a different experience than a traditional overnight camp can offer. The 2:5 staffing ratio allows campers to have fun and grow in a safe and supportive camp environment.





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## Discovery and transformation for a high school student

**W**AS a high school junior in the spring of 2010 when my mother approached me about a college she'd discovered. It was called Landmark College and it catered exclusively to students with learning differences. Although I'd struggled more and more with every year of school, I told her there was no way in h\*\*\* I'd go to a college like that. I would attend a traditional school, and I would excel despite my ADHD and executive functioning disorder.

My dismissal did nothing to diminish my mother's enthusiasm, and being a much cleverer person than I am, she tricked me with a compromise. Landmark ran a three-week high school program every summer. She encouraged me to at least attend that and I agreed, knowing that I'd hate it and could use that to justify my rejection of Landmark as a college.

I was wrong.

That summer, I arrived in Putney and discovered something incredible. On a beautiful New England campus, I found a community of people who *got it*. My peers had faced a variety of challenges, some remarkably similar to my own. And the faculty *got it*. Many of the teachers had LDs. The majority of the residential staff *had* LDs. It didn't take me long to fall in love with this community.

My time at Landmark was well-spent. I attended classes that I'd chosen, including photography and Vermont environments and biology. At the same time, I was learning about the brain. I learned about disabilities that impacted me and my peers and strategies for excelling with those differences. I enjoyed afternoon activities, and during free

time I became closer every day with some of the best people I'd ever met. A decade later, I still keep in touch with some of them. That's not an anomaly; many students become friends for life.

It should come as no surprise that I returned to Landmark in 2011 as a college freshman, and that the following summer was my first of many as high school program staff. I had the opportunity to live with students and guide them through the same life-changing experience that I'd had. Every year, I witnessed the most incredible transformations. Amazing young people who'd spent their entire lives feeling like failures realized not only that there were others like them, but that they could succeed. Words can't describe how powerful that is. Even students who arrived determined to hate it didn't want to leave on the last day.

During those years, I became close with a theater teacher named Marty who has since passed away. He had an amazing ability to pull students out of their comfort zones and inspire them with a confidence they'd never known they had. Marty told me that the ADHD/LD brain is like a racecar; it may be complex, and it takes skill to operate, but it can do astonishing things.

That's the second most important thing students learn in the program. The most important thing they learn is that they're not alone.

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Landmark College's High School Summer Program gives rising high school juniors and seniors a taste of college life, while helping them to discover and develop their own personal learning styles. This highly structured, three-week program gives students skills and strategies to do college-level work, and also helps them develop better study habits and executive function skills. **A**