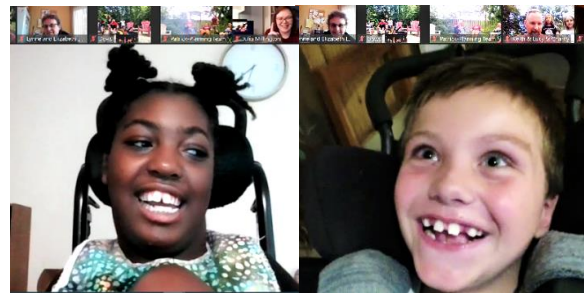


Mark Wallace, Executive Director of Organizational Culture and International Partnerships

Christian Horizons held its 2021 Virtual Family Camp during the final week of August. We joined together for a “virtual campfire” experience online. Some families gathered outside around a real fire. Others used light-up tissue paper campfires that they had made during craft time or enjoyed the campfires they saw on others’ screens. Online Family Camp is a lot different than being together in person, but the smiles (and the s’mores) are still here.

Herb, one of our long-time volunteers, leads us in a song where we take each camper’s name and sing it in a melody. As we all sing out the person’s name, they are ‘spotlighted’ in the call. First it is Leanne, and her smile is brighter than any campfire. Next, we sing to Andrew, Nathan, Becca, Victoria – on and on, smile after smile. Each camper enjoys their time in the spotlight as we recognize them and sing their name. Each person is known and celebrated.



Leanne

Andrew

One of the things I love about Family Camp is that it provides a distilled version of Christian Horizons’ core values. We celebrate the uniqueness of each person and their family (value people), create an environment where everybody is welcomed as they are (foster belonging), rely on volunteers to support families to have a much-needed rest (serve others), and campers experience their choice of activities where they can shine or try something new (respect gifts).

After the campfire, I talked to Leanne and her mom Robin about their huge smiles and asked them what they liked about camp. Robin said, “In person, it is all about the accessibility, the boats, tubing – Leanne loves the water, so she is able to go in the lake. She is also very social... and I get a break to just relax while I know she is doing something that she loves. It is tough to get a break, especially for single-parent families. With this virtual thing, I thought it would be hard, but we are loving it so much – just being able to connect. Leanne has loved the crafts and campfire.” I know they are looking forward to in-person camps again, but we celebrate that the virtual connection meets a need right now.

We hear regularly that Family Camp is some families’ only vacation option. A space at camp is literally an answer to their prayers. In the same way, the supports we provide throughout Canada and around the world are often answers to families’ prayers who have been waiting a long time for services and support.

This is a good reminder that whether we serve at camp, a family home, in someone's home or with community participation programs, we need to be living out our values. Each day, this is our challenge and our joy. How do we promote the kind of community where everybody belongs? Whose face will light up when they hear me call their name?

Making the Connection

- Do you have any nicknames? What does it feel like when someone who knows you well calls you by name?
- What are some ways we can help *each person* who uses our services know that they are unique, they are valued, and we're thankful that they're here?
- If you've been to Family Camp in the past, consider sharing your experience with someone you know, and point them to christianhorizons.org/familycamps to find out more!

