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"You can't really move forward until you look back."

~ Dr. Cornel West



Photo from "Building Communities of Belonging: The Ongoing Story of Christian Horizons"

Did you know that Christian Horizons started as a summer camping experience? In 1967, what was then known as the "Ontario Christian Association for Exceptional Children" launched a camping ministry in the Haliburton Highlands. Jim and Adrienne Reese knew that new ways of supporting families who experienced disabilities were needed, so they set out to meet these needs with a lot of faith and very few expectations about what would arise from their vision. Then, from the 1970's on, Christian Horizons began providing more community living supports for people. We were an active part of the movement advocating for the closure of institutions and supported people as these institutions closed across Ontario and Saskatchewan.

As I shared time with families at the 2022 Christian Horizons Family Camp (christianhorizons.org/family-camps) at Elim Lodge near Peterborough, Ontario, I was encouraged to see the Reese's adventurous spirit alive and well. Certainly, it shone through the volunteers and Christian Horizons employees who came together to make the first in-person Family Camp since the pandemic began a success. Yet it was in the stories and perspectives of the families and people who experienced disabilities where I found the most encouragement. Despite a challenging past few years for those who attended, they were full of stories of hope and joy amidst their difficulties.

- One mother shared innovative ideas about how her adult daughter could continue to live in the same building as her and receive individualized supports. This mother is eager to partner with Christian Horizons since we share the goal of transforming service options, but she faces barriers at the provincial funding and administrative level. She will not take "no" for an answer, though, and keeps advocating for creative support options.
- Another couple had been avid canoeists and campers before their daughter had been born. Their daughter uses a wheelchair and experiences multiple disabilities. At family camp, this doesn't prevent the family from going tubing and making the

most of every opportunity! They continue to take risks, but they do it together and support one another through it. When his daughter flew out of the tube, the father launched out alongside her to keep her head floating the right way up.

- Still another family faces barriers to being fully welcomed and included in their church. They long for a space in which their son with a disability and his mother can lead worship together on stage – a community where people can express themselves freely during services and be known and loved for who they are without being told to “shhhh....” At camp, they began brainstorming with others and may start a church that is inclusive from the ground-up in their local community.



Technology has changed since 1967, but the spirit of adventure lives on at the 2022 Christian Horizons Family Camp at Elim Lodge

These stories of hope remind me that we still have good work ahead of us – that the resilience and creativity of families, people with disabilities, and caregivers is alive and well. With new options for affordable housing just around the corner and continued advocacy for the needs and desires of people in their communities, the innovative and faithful spirit of Jim and Adrienne Reese is precisely what we need for the journey ahead.

Making the Connection

- What are some of the creative ways of providing supports and services that you are aware of in your community?
- What are some of the things that help us to be innovative and bold as an organization? What are some of the things that get in the way of this or make innovation and creativity challenging?
- Keith writes about the ways that families at camp inspire creativity and change. Who are the people in your life who inspire you in this way?