

Hold onto that sleeping bag! LINX Camps packs the overnight benefits into a day camp experience.

By: Grace Tummino, LINX Marketing Specialist

Day camps are a wonderful option for parents who are uncertain of their child's readiness (or their own) for the responsibilities and separation of attending a sleepaway camp. By providing an environment rich in the same experiences, day camps can be a quality stress-free alternative for many parents. When I think back on my own experience as an 8 year old attending a 5-week sleepaway camp, I remember the fun I had learning to swim, playing camp games, watching ceremonies, and making new friends. As an adult now, it is clear to me that my mom was the one who wasn't ready, and her emotions made her do some silly and irrational things to compensate. I heard about how she would "camp out" for an hour or two in her car next to the main building at night just to be nearby. I also heard about the drive she made to the camp one evening because she wanted to make sure I had enough medicine. In looking down at the car's speedometer, she was shocked to find that she was driving 90 mph to a camp that was only a few miles away! In this case, it's pretty clear my mom was not ready, and could have benefited from finding a day camp with the same benefits as a sleepaway camp.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Josh Schiering, LINX Vice President and Executive Director, about how LINX Camps is like a sleepover camp but without the overnight stay. He was overflowing with enthusiasm and information, and I'd like to share with you some important points from our conversation:

Me: Josh, how is LINX Camps like a sleepaway camp but without the sleepover?

Josh: We are similar in the way we approach community building. We have camp rituals on a weekly basis that are entrenched in camp history, like coming together for opening and closing ceremonies, focusing on team spirit, having traditional camp sing-alongs, and

participating in competitions. We have our own vocabulary that is specific to us and becomes part of our culture. We also have camp-wide special events every Friday to unite the whole camp in a common theme, like the Olympics.

The trend today is for families to seek out specialty camps for their kids, like sports, science, and dance, so children can pursue their passions and interests under the guidance of expert instruction. We are able to do this without losing sight of building a sense of familiarity and family. We offer 1-week sessions with over 30 premier camps, and most kids enroll in 6 to 10 weeks of the summer. They are able to go from one type of camp to the next while staying at LINX Camps with all the things that are familiar to them. Regardless of the program chosen, they still have the common bond and routine.

I have learned from my own life experiences at sleepaway camp, and we've infused a lot of the same qualities into our day camp experience, which is why I suspect our campers stay with us until they're much older. Typically you see a lot of 5th and 6th grade kids launching into sleepaway camp, but I think because LINX Camps does such an outstanding job of creating that sense of family, tradition, rituals and belonging that we are able to retain our campers much longer than the norm or the industry standard. We had many kids who were 5th through 8th graders that are now 9th and 10th grade CITs (Counselor in Training).

Last summer, we had our first LINX Camps Family Picnic, where parents, children and LINX Staff came together in true camp spirit to enjoy a traditional camp experience complete with camp songs, competitions and a warm campfire. It was clear to me that once the parents got here, our family had expanded!

Me: What about teamwork and sportsmanship? Can this be a major focus in a day camp?

Josh: A lot of kids only get to experience a level of teamwork and unity when they do high school sports. We actually hire a lot of former captains and coaches to work with our groups to bring that communal team-oriented spirit and energy into our camp groups as young as 3 and 4 year olds and up through the high school level. Campers rally

around that sense of team, sportsmanship and unity. They have a terrific sense of pride in their specific groups. It's very positive in nature. It's never at the expense of another group; there is no putting down of another group. You can always be the best you can be without knocking down your peers, and that is part of our good sportsmanship lessons and what we teach our campers.

Me: Sleepaway camps have a lot of structure to keep things moving along during the day. Tell me a little about structure and LINX Camps.

We have learned from our life experiences that children thrive in a structured setting with predictability. So knowing a schedule in advance is a comfort for the kids. They need to know what they will be doing for first and second period, when they will break for lunch, and how much time they have left for swimming, etc. So yes, we have a structured and prescheduled day. All that being said, it's not regimented to the point that there is any stress built around anything. While we maintain a schedule, all children get to their activity with a lot of chanting and cheering. It isn't a high-pressured environment in which anyone feels pressured because of a schedule. All the chanting and cheering helps with keeping them motivated to get from one activity to the next.

Me: Does LINX Camps provide the same opportunity for the development of social skills and learning life lessons?

Josh: There are countless teachable moments in all of our life experiences and all of what we do, whether at school, on the playground, during sports, and most certainly, at day camp. Kids do have the opportunity at our camp to make friend requests to be grouped together, but many kids come from all over (we serve almost 20 different townships) and don't know with whom they're going to be grouped. So kids learn how to get along, be a teammate, be a good sport, put themselves out there, take chances, be a good friend, and lift someone up. We have an expression we use at camp, "no put downs, only lift ups." While they're not sleeping in the same bunkhouse together, they are put together in groups of 8 to 10 kids per group from all over the place. This makes it a great opportunity to appreciate and respect one another's differences, talents

and abilities, and to learn how to work together in conflict resolution, problem solving and independent thinking. We work really hard to get these elements into everything that these kids are doing. We steer them in a way to solve their own conflicts and their own problems.

But first and foremost, we peel it all the way back and really build a support network. The relationships that our counselors build with each group and each individual are built on trust, and the campers learn very quickly that these adults in their lives - their counselors - are there for them. Kids learn to make choices. Within our freedom camp, kids are presented with options every afternoon of what they want to do as their specialty. So they can act independently and pursue their own interests, go with the flow, or team up with a friend. They push themselves in swimming to get to the next level, learn how to handle frustration if they fail at something, and pick themselves up because there is no failing, only stumbling. They learn that we get up every time we fall. There are a ton of life lessons and learning that goes on everyday in a day camp setting.

Me: What is the benefit of going home after the camp day is over?

Josh: It is important for kids to have family time and recharge their batteries at the end of an exciting camp day. Kids want to talk to their parents and siblings about who is going to win the spirit competition, what color Olympic team they are on, or what they are looking forward to the next day. Getting that time at home with parents and siblings is something terrific.

Obviously many kids graduate to sleepaway camp and it's a great experience for them to explore their own individuality and learn a level of independence. But not every kid is ready for sleepaway camp at a young age and it's not for every family. To have day camps such as ours that create and combine that sense of unity and togetherness with a traditional camp experience, while you still get to go home and have that family time, I think, is terrific.

Me: Why do you think LINX Camps was voted the #1 Day Camp in Massachusetts?

Josh: Our entire team has worked to meet the demands of the day camp market by providing a wide array of exceptional one-week programs led by expert instructors. We add the continuity of character values, teamwork, traditional camp values, spirit, and rituals across each of those programs. Our campers feel at home and emotionally safe throughout each of the programs they choose. They flourish in a safe environment while getting to do what they love. We've created a place for them to succeed, train, and be cared for like they would at home.

If you like the idea of overnight camp because of the activities and traditional experiences they offer, but are unsure about enrolling your child in one, feel free to give us a call to schedule your own private tour of LINX Camps. You'll see first hand why we are an outstanding day camp choice with many traditional qualities for your family to enjoy for years to come.

For more information about LINX Camps, contact LINX at information@linxcamps.com