



DIABETES CAMP of WV:

To provide a **SAFE** environment for children with **DIABETES** while providing an invaluable opportunity to **GAIN SKILLS** managing their disease

Camp Kno-Koma- A History

For over 65 years a group of people have worked quietly in the background doing what would seem to some a noble effort, but to them it was just the right thing to do. This effort has been to provide children with diabetes a safe camp environment where they can just be kids. This camp, which started back in 1950 and continues today, is called Camp Kno-Koma. Although this camp has changed locations and leadership many times in its last 65 plus years of existence, it is still providing its original goal of providing a camp for children with diabetes.

Camp Kno-Koma was started in 1950 under the direction of Dr. George P. Heffner. The camp was held at Camp Cliffside in Alum Creek and was attended by 34 campers between the ages of 6 and 14. It was a totally free camp, and the money for it was raised by Dr. Heffner going up and down Capitol Street in Charleston, WV and soliciting

money from every merchant. The cost for operating this camp of 34 children was just under \$900. Dr. Heffner continued to serve as the camp medical director until 1963 when he moved his practice to Florida. It was at that point that Dr. R. N. O'Dell took over the medical direction of the camp. He served with the camp until 1968, when it was taken over by Dr. William G. Klingberg. Dr. Klingberg led the camp from 1968 until 1983. It was during that time that Dr. Rick Blum was brought onboard as the medical director. Dr. Blum started with the camp in 1981 and continues as its medical director to present day.

Since its beginning Camp Kno-Koma has seen many changes and has been held at many locations. The camp has gone



from its original location of Camp Cliffside, to Camp Camelot, to Camp Caesar, then Camp Galahad. The camp then went back to Camp Caesar where it ran until 1987. From 1958 until 1987 the camp was held for two weeks at the various locations throughout the state. During these early years of existence, there were two people that maintained a constant presence with the camp. They were Mary Connolly, and Dot Arthur. Mary Connolly served the camp from 1950 until 1987. During this time, she helped in many planning activities, and fundraising efforts. She also served as the treasurer for the many years.



1950 Group Picture

In the early days of camp, the camp was a separate organization that was supported by the West Virginia Affiliate of the American Diabetes Association. This support grew over the years, and the camp changed from a being an organization that was supported by the ADA, to an affiliated organization. This affiliation continued until 1987, It was then that sad times fell on the diabetes camp. Due to financial troubles of the WV ADA, and the trend toward the ADA not sponsoring camps, the national affiliate of the ADA chose to stop funding Camp Kno-Koma. The diabetes camp ceased to function. This was a challenging time for the camp according to then medical director of the camp, Dr. Rick Blum. The group pushed on to hold a camp in 1988, but due to financial problems, it was impossible to organize. Except for money that was held in trust for the camp by the Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation there was nothing left to show for all of the camp's years of hard work.

It was during this time that many organizations tried to continue the tradition of the camp by either holding day camps at Mountwood Park in Wood County, or by



providing financial support for children to go to out of state camps. After a four-year break from the camp, several nurses and physicians from around the state, including Dr. Rick Blum, The Diabetes Center at CAMC, The Diabetes Center at Camden Clark Memorial Hospital, and Nurses at WVU Hospitals came together with the goal of restarting camp. A plan was set in place to hold the camp for 1992 at Camp Caesar in Cowan, WV. This endeavor was challenging not only from the logistical side of finding a camp site, and getting the money to support the camp, but being able to find enough medical and nursing personnel to be able to safely care for the children in the camping environment.

There was one group that helped to push the camp into reorganizing in 1992, and that was the Alpha Delta Kappa Sorority of WV. This is a teacher's organization that helped by calling all their members into action from all over the state to not only provide financial support, but to get the little things that they needed to be able to run the camp on a day to day basis.

When the camp reorganized, there were many problems that faced this new and exciting



organization. There was great concern of affiliating with an organization to provide fiscal management, so the group decided to form a new board of directors to provide the direction and leadership for this reborn camp effort. This new board once formed decided that they needed to be their own independent organization, so they would be responsible for the future financial security of the camp. This new board formed a new corporation called The Diabetes Camp of West Virginia, Inc. This was the organization to lead the camp into the next millennium, or until there is a cure for diabetes. This new organization enlisted the help of a concerned set of parents who had a child who attended camp in the late 1970's. They saw the positive benefits that their child had received from attending Camp Kno-Koma and wanted future generations of children to be able to have the same experiences that all of the other children had available to them. This couple John and Joan Steven, served as the Executive Secretary, and Treasurer of this new organization. They helped lead the camp into the modern world of business and helped them camp to obtain the 501(c)3 designation as a non-profit charitable organization. They also help in many ways with obtaining funding for different projects, including funding from the Governor's contingency fund during the last term of

Gaston Caperton. Joan Steven's continues to work with the board of directors in assisting with camp operations and administers the school lunch summer program at camp. John Steven died in January 1998, and the loss continues to be felt within the organization.

In this new era of the diabetes camp there are many civic organizations that have taken on the funding of Camp Kno-Koma as their organizational project. These organizations providing monetary and logistical support above and beyond their call of duty. They include the The Grand Encampment of West Virginia, IOOF, the Lions Clubs of WV, and Alpha Delta Kappa the teacher's sorority of WV. In addition, the WV Department of Health & Human Resources has continuously been able to provide camp with grants. Besides these major supporters, the camp receives much support from many other smaller organizations throughout the state. These groups through their continuous fund-raising effort were able to help continue this tradition of camp, and make sure that no child is ever turned away because they are unable to pay. Another organization that is very supportive of the Camp Kno-Koma is the Henry Logan Foundation, they provide a grant each year to help fund children from the Parkersburg area to be able to attend camp for little or no charge at all.

From 2000 to 2002 Camp Kno-Koma added a chapter to their camping history by moving the camp from Camp Caesar in Webster County to Camp Russell which is located within Oglebay Park in Wheeling, WV. This move has allowed the camp program to expand to include such activities as attending a Pittsburgh Pirates Baseball game, and have the entire camp travel to Kennywood amusement park in Pittsburgh, PA.

From 2003 to 2009, Camp Kno-Koma was held at Camp Virgil Tate in Kanawha County. While there the attendance been as high as 144 campers. The Diabetes Camp also held weekend programs in the spring and fall to further the presence of diabetes camping in West Virginia.



Camper Checking her Blood Sugar

Since 2010, camp has been held at the Greenbrier Youth Camp, located in the Monongahela National Forest, near Anthony, WV.

The camp has seen many changes over the years, going from 33 campers and a budget of \$900 to 120 plus campers and an annual budget close to \$100,000. This organization started on the foundation of a need for children with diabetes to be able to attend camp in a fun and safe way that has continued and stood the test of time and anything thrown in its way. It continues to grow every year, serving not only West Virginia, but also the bordering area of the surrounding states. Today the camp serves as a site for education for many different health professions. It is also a place where the children can learn about how to live with their diabetes, see other children with diabetes that are just like them, but most importantly it is a place where children with diabetes can go to just have fun and be themselves.