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The Impact of Diabetes Camp

By Lane McAuliffe

Lane McAuliffe is the Associate Program Director for Camp Sweeney, a camp for youth with type 1 diabetes in Texas. Lane has been on Camp Sweeny staff for 4 years and believes strongly in the power of diabetes camps to impact the kids that attend them.

I remember taking a particularly difficult class when I was in my sophomore year of college. All my friends that had taken the class in the past had told that this would be the hardest class I ever took. On the first day, the professor welcomed everyone to the class and handed out an enormous packet of websites, videos, books, and all sorts of other resources related to the topic of the class. After passing it out, he told us that if we utilized all the resources he provided us and committed time each day for the rest of the semester to working on the material, we would earn an A in the class. On that day, the professor gave me everything I could possibly need to be successful, but now it all fell on me to motivate myself to put in the work necessary to succeed. In a way, Type 1 Diabetes is a lot like that class. A physician can sit their patient down and give them insulin, a meter, a pump, a CGM, and any other tools they need to be successful, but at the end of the day, it falls on the individual to go home and motivate themselves to utilize those tools to succeed.



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But the difference between those two examples is that motivating yourself to take care of yourself and live healthily with Type 1 is a whole lot harder than any class. Not only will an individual have to face diabetes every day for the rest of their lives, but often, they also feel very isolated when no one else around them has to live every day managing a chronic illness. Most kids don't have to poke their finger or stick a needle in their body



5-10 times a day. Most kids don't have to go see the school nurse every day before lunch. A type 1 diabetic can't get through a day without constant reminders that they have a disease.

As a kid, all I wanted more than anything else, was to fit in with everyone else. Go to sleepovers, play soccer, just go about the day to day life of being a kid. Type 1 diabetes makes fitting in a heck of a lot harder because you constantly feel different from everyone else. What's incredible about Camp Sweeney, a summer camp for kids with Type 1, is that you take a kid from this world where diabetes constantly makes them feel different, and you put them in a world where

diabetes is very normal. When a kid goes to diabetes camp, all of a sudden they're surrounded by hundreds of other kids who all have diabetes, who all know what it feels like to go low before a big game or to have friends ask why they have a cell phone attached to their body. When you step into a place where diabetes is normal, it's almost like it disappears. And when diabetes disappears, young diabetics can celebrate what makes them special instead of dwelling on what makes them different.

Over the course of four years on staff at Camp Sweeney, I have countless stories of the incredible impact the camp experience has on these kids. Camp Sweeney is a place where you see a 7-year old boy hold hands with an 11-year old because the



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older boy is scared to give his shot by himself. It's a place where you see an older girl who has struggled with her control her whole life take a younger girl under her wing and strive to be an example for that younger kid. Camp is truly a place that brings out the best in everyone.

But to me, the most incredible thing about Camp Sweeney is the family it creates – a family that lasts all year round and for years to come. Campers come together for nights of fellowship, called PFC Life, throughout the fall, winter, and spring. Dedicated counselors stay in touch with their campers even though they may live several states away. Diabetes doesn't go away at the end of the summer, and neither does Camp Sweeney! Diabetes is a battle every day. You have to wake up each and every morning and fight this disease. Fighting this fight when you feel alone can make it so much harder, but Camp Sweeney and other diabetes camps across the country give young diabetics the opportunity to come together and fight this fight together. And together, the fight feels a little bit easier, life feels a little more normal, and the future looks a whole lot brighter.