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Camp BRIDGES and its Effect on Pediatric Renal Transplant Recipients and Their Families

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Problem/purpose: Children with end stage organ failure require intensive disease management and education to enhance their allograft function and achieve the highest possible quality of life (QoL). To help achieve this we began a camp to help provide an integrated approach to enhance their well being, and giving them a chance to "be normal" and attend camp when that is often not otherwise possible.

Approach: We provide 2 camps and one 1 day symposium for children who have received a solid organ transplant and their families. We have a camp for ages 12-18, and a family camp for all recipients and their families. Activities include: social events, coping skills, support groups, dealing with financial issues, Voc Rehab, career counseling, developing self confidence and esteem, and a review of meds and nutrition. At our 1 day symposium, we invite speakers that cover topics from fitness, education/ school, sexuality, and peer pressure. Staff for each event includes a Nephrologist, RN's, Social Worker, Counselor, Child Life Therapist, Nutritionist, and many volunteers. All are offered at no cost.

Results: We began in 1996 with 5 campers, and now host as many as 175 campers/ family members per session. We found that many attending camp have developed life long friendships. Families have learned important lessons that have enhanced their lives. Many of our camp "graduates" have gone on to college (using scholarship monies awarded via our foundation) and now come back and serve as counselors and as positive role models to the younger campers. It has also enhanced the lives of their family members as the parents/ guardians have expanded their support networks, and siblings are allowed the opportunity to attend "camp" as well along with their chronically ill sibling.

Conclusions: By offering additional educational experiences away from the hospital, we are able to enhance the QoL of the children and family members who have received a solid organ transplant, and help them learn additional ways to assist in improving their outcomes, minimizing illnesses, and helping them to become independent successful young adults.

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