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## For young dialysis patients, a summer camp experience

### Volunteers help chronically ill children to camp

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Andrea Lypka/ MyFoxTampaBay.com

TAMPA - Carlo Posada is preparing to head to summer camp, and it can't come soon enough.

"I can't wait to go. It's going to be fun because I hear they have archery, and I am good at archery," the 13 year old says.

He will meet his best friend there, 10-year-old Carlton "CJ" Harris, who says the summer camp is the time of his life.

"I like to play with people, party, go in the pool and stuff," CJ said. "I am so excited."

Carlos and CJ are like any other kids heading for summer camp, but with one difference: they are both kidney dialysis patients, and they are not heading to just any



Morgan Cox is 13, and has been a three-time camper.

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summer camp: they will spend one week at Camp Boggy Creek, in Eustis, Florida.

The soon-to-be-campers are kidney disease patients at University of South Florida's Pediatric Nephrology department, and receive treatment at various Bay Area hospitals. Some of them are transplant patients, or are undergoing dialysis - and they all know about Camp Boggy Creek.

It's a special treat: every year, patients between 7 and 16, go for one week to what some consider to be the Super Bowl of summer camps. Between 130-150 campers each camp session will get to hang out with other children just like them and do things like healthy children do: ride horses, cook and bake, dance, do arts and crafts, fishing, sports, laugh and joke.

And what makes it all even better is that none of the families have to pay a dime to send their children there.

Four children who are being treated at the Tampa General Hospital say it is fun there because they are busy from sun up to sun down.

Morgan Cox is 13, and has been a three-time camper. The Dowdell Middle Magnet School student says she remembers last year's science cabin adventure where they watched Charlotte's Web.

"But I like the best meeting other friends," she said.

Other friends who also fight for their lives.

"Last year one of the patients got very ill, we kept her right there because it was the only thing she got to do the whole year," said TGH dialysis nurse Vicki Lay.

Lay says volunteering is a way for her to give back. This is her second time volunteering at the camp, and she says she plans to continue doing it in the future. She says the kids can enjoy the camp because of the medical care they receive there.

"The kids have been going and I wanted to get out of my comfort zone," Lay said. "I just fell in love with it, it's wonderful."

And for Lay, it's a family affair: her daughter Amy Stokes is a pediatric nurse at TGH, and this will also be her second year as a volunteer there.

Stokes says their main role at the camp is to play with the children and let them enjoy the camp -- for most of them, it is a once-a-year opportunity to play and make friends.

"We let them be kids at the camp and they don't get that a lot when they have to spend four hours three times a week at the hospital," Stokes said.

The volunteer nurses and doctors will care for the children who require special treatment for chronic kidney problems or kidney transplants at the campsite. Mary Lloyd is also a nurse at the pediatric nephrology unit at TGH. She says she got to go to the camp three years ago when they were short staffed.

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"This is my third year, I loved every minute of it. I like to see the kids outside the hospital. To see them run around and laugh and joke. To see them make friends, just to see them be regular kids," Lloyd said.

All the volunteering and care leaves a strong impression on the children who go to the camp. Like 13-year-old Morgan Cox, who now wants to help others by becoming a nurse when she grows up.

"These people are taking care of me; I am going to take care of them when I grow up," she says.

For more information about Camp Boggy Creek, go to <http://www.boggycreek.org/>

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