



Mission:

The mission of Camp AmeriKids is to enhance the lives of youth living with the challenges of HIV/AIDS and sickle cell disease by providing an enriching summer camp experience, year-round skill building and a supported transition to adulthood.

Program goals are:

- To enhance confidence and self-esteem
- To allow for participation in creative, fun, athletic and artistic activities not otherwise available
- To promote the development of important leadership and life-skills
- To improve medical compliance that continues beyond the camp sessions
- To strengthen relationships between siblings by allowing them to share a camp experience
- To offer respite for campers and their families
- To create opportunities for socialization in a nurturing, stigma-free environment
- To encourage respect, kindness, trust and other positive values
- To provide emotional and educational guidance during the challenging transition into adulthood

Our Story:

Camp AmeriKids was founded in 1995 to address the needs of children living with HIV/AIDS by providing them with an enriching residential summer camp experience.

In 2005, in order to meet the needs of youth ages 16-18 who are transitioning into young adulthood, Camp AmeriKids created a year-round Leader-in-Training (LIT) Program. This program helps give the teens we serve coping skills to navigate through life's challenges. Our staff meet with these youth throughout the year and help facilitate various educational and skills building activities that foster self-esteem, leadership skills and emotional and social betterment.

For many years, Camp AmeriKids was part of AmeriCares, a nonprofit organization that supports disaster relief and humanitarian aid around the world. In 2009, due to the economic downturn, AmeriCares made the difficult decision to cut programs that were not core to their mission; this included community programs such as ours. While we witnessed an elimination of funding, we rose to the challenge and were able to forge ahead as an independent nonprofit with the help of our loyal donors, board and friends.

We have since grown into a strong sustainable organization and are proud to have been able to continue our mission to give the children we serve a place they can call their own. Our children struggle with the challenges of the medical conditions they are born with and Camp AmeriKids is determined to continue to provide them a place where they feel safe and face no judgment.

This past summer, we expanded our program to include children living with sickle cell disease. It is because of our ability to serve children with HIV/AIDS and other special needs that have expanded our program to include kids living with this debilitating bloody disorder.

This year, we have begun the pilot phase of our new **Mentor program**. This program would provide our youth with year-round, one-on-one support during the difficult transition to adulthood, and would allow them to connect regularly with positive adult role models.

Programs

Summer Camp Program – where kids can be kids:

Camp AmeriKids provides two one-week residential camp sessions for 250 campers from daily play activities outdoors, to workshops in dance, theatre and art, our kids are active all day long.

Their activities include:

- Sports
- Swimming
- Instruction
- Nature
- Dance
- Drama
- Arts and Crafts
- Poetry & Spoken Word
- Team building
- Tower climbing
- Boating
- Music
- Film Production

Our instructors include performers, visual artists, singers and music producers, all of whom volunteer their time and talent to work with our kids. Exposure to play, music and art in the camp setting really boosts the self confidence of our campers, as kids with different skills and personalities can participate, whether on stage as performers or behind the scenes as directors, writers and set designers. Each camp session ends with a camper Talent Show, which is a culmination of all the dedication, focus and teamwork during the week, and one of the highlights of camp.

Sports are also key to the Camp AmeriKids program. There are very few things in life that can bring children together in a collaborative and fun way and build team spirit and confidence like sports can. Through sports, kids develop physically and mentally and strengthen their spirits. The kids at camp participate in softball, kickball, soccer, touch football and basketball. Many kids join sports at camp because of the infectious energy and the team spirit that the kids exude when playing these games.

Leader-In-Training Program – where kids become responsible young adults:

The mission of the Camp AmeriKids Leader-in-Training Program is to provide emotional and mental support and life skills to teenagers impacted by HIV/AIDS and sickle cell disease. The program emphasizes self-esteem and exposes these kids to new opportunities they would not otherwise have. In addition, emotional, social and educational guidance is fostered. The program staff works with the adolescents to strengthen their leadership skills so that they can begin to realize their own potential and work toward achieving their life goals while becoming actively engaged members of their communities.

Participants remain in the program for two years, during which we offer them both weekend team building retreats and New York based day trips. This past year, activities included sailing lessons, river rafting, weekend skills building retreats, community service projects, an Education and Career Day, visits to museums, and various arts and cultural programming activities. These activities help them build self confidence, reflect on goals for the future, explore creative abilities, and address personal and mental challenges.

LITs choose to give back to the camp program by volunteering as Junior Counselors during the summer. As Junior Counselors working in the younger cabins, these teens set a positive example for the other campers, who strive to become leaders themselves one day. Upon completing their second year of the program, participants are encouraged to continue their involvement with the camp community and many return year after year as counselors.

Due to complicated medical routines, financial limitations and social stigma, the children we serve have difficulty attending “traditional” camps and youth programs. Camp AmeriKids serves a critical and unique role in meeting the needs of these underserved children. We help level the playing field for them and give them exposure to opportunities they would otherwise not have.

“I gained a lot being at camp and being in the LIT program. It made me look at life differently and question how I live my own. ~ Melissa, former Camper and LIT Program Graduate